GALSTON: BIG GOVERNMENT GETS ITS GROOVE BACK

SPECIAL REPORT: THE COMING GLOBAL FRESHWATER CRISIS

OUR SUMMER BOOKS ISSUE

# THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

LIBERAL INTELLIGENCE

JUNE 2008




# Can Identity Politics Save the Right?

## (It may be all the Republicans have left.)

BY MARK SCHMITT

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# THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

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*"[The Democratic Party] has been seized by alien and un-American elements. ... Next November you will choose the American way."*

—FRANK KNOX, CAMPAIGNING FOR 1936 GOP PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEE ALF LANDON AGAINST FDR

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*Cover art by John Ritter*

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# The Trade Debate We Need

An anxiety bordering on panic is unnerving America's economic elites as political support for "free trade" dwindles, along with declining earnings. While mainstream economists have long contended that trade had minimal effects on wages, prestigious defectors such as Alan Blinder and Paul Samuelson have lately concluded otherwise. It turns out that the popular concerns are rooted in reality.

The elite response has been divided. One the one hand, most of the regime's defenders continue to treat trade mainly as a problem of voter ignorance and politician posturing. Defenders speak as if the main goal is to preserve the current trade rules, rather than to assure that an open economy delivers broadly shared prosperity. A means has mutated into an end.

*The New York Times* regularly runs trade editorials with all the sophistication of the first day of an economics 101 course, circa 1970. The shriller *Washington Post*, in an editorial titled "Drop Dead, Colombia," describes the proposed Colombia pact as "a no-brainer—*especially* at a time of rising U.S. joblessness." But who believes that a bit more trade with tiny Colombia will seriously spur U.S. jobs?

The *Times* concedes that lagging worker pay and job loss are real problems but repeats the canard that trade is a trivial cause. By contrast, Blinder's articles in this magazine and *Foreign Affairs* note that for every job that trade displaces directly, it undercuts wages in many others by the tacit threat of relocating. The *Times* insists that the cure is more education. However, as MIT economist Frank Levy, another respected moderate, recently observed, the only group with average income gains since 2000 is holders of advanced degrees. The remedy for reduced worker bargaining power, said Levy, is not for everyone to get a law degree or MBA.

In its support of the Colombia pact, the *Post* mocked the argument against rewarding a nation where union organizers are regularly murdered. "Actually, in 2006, union members were slightly *less* likely than the average Colombian to be murdered," the *Post* explained. "But the human rights issue has served as cover for many Democrats whose true objections are to free trade itself."

Now, however, another high-profile globalizer is having second thoughts. In two important columns in the *Financial Times*, former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers reprimanded those who merely repeat conventional assumptions about trade, adding: "There are reasons to think that economic success abroad will be more problematic for American workers in the future." In his April 27 column, Summers wrote that "the global economy encourages the development of stateless elites whose allegiance is to global economic success and their own prosperity rather than the interests of the nation where they are headquartered." His May 5 sequel declared that trade agreements should not promote competition to reduce taxes, or undercut social or labor rights, adding, "There has not been enough serious consideration of the alternative—global co-operation to raise standards."

Larry Summers! Is this an epic conversion, or just more subtle damage-control? We await details of Summer's efforts to influence actual policy.

In fairness, details are also thin in the presidential debates. The Democratic candidates have criticized NAFTA, the Colombia deal, and China's currency manipulation but haven't quite offered a comprehensive critique of the current trading system or a coherent alternative—thus lending credence to editorials about pandering. The deeper debate is not about "trade" but about the rules of the current trade regime. Every recent trade deal has expanded global property rights while undercutting the offsetting social rights that progressives struggled to obtain throughout the 20th century.

A separate problem is that successive American presidents have given foreign nations' mercantilist practices a free pass as long as corporations can benefit by relocating operations overseas. And while domestic policy can compensate for some dislocations of trade, it takes heroic public commitment. As I have noted elsewhere, Denmark, a successful trading nation, spends 4.5 percent of its gross domestic product on retraining, job creation, and wage support—that would be $600 billion a year in the United States—and Denmark's government and unions work systematically to ensure that all jobs pay a living wage.

*The* Times *trade editorials have all the sophistication of the first day of an economics 101 course, circa 1970.*

The *Times* urges candidates to "remind workers of trade's benefits." But trade benefits have been advertised ad nauseam. Instead, the presidential debate needs to educate voters about the real trade issue—how to defend and expand a mixed economy of broad prosperity as capitalism becomes increasingly global. **TAP**

— ROBERT KUTTNER



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## R-E-S-P-E-C-T

I AGREE WITH ROBERT Kuttner that human-service jobs should be "good jobs" that pay living wages with good benefits ["Good Jobs for Americans Who Help Americans," May 2008]. Unfortunately, Kuttner fails to acknowledge the elephant in the living room: Most of the human-service jobs he mentions are held by women. Our society's continued subconscious belief in the male breadwinner and concomitant belief that child care, elder care, etc., should be done by the wife at home hampers movement toward better pay for human-service occupations.

Holding the building trade union's prevailing wage as an example of government's support for collective bargaining and willingness to uphold good wages only reinforces this male-breadwinner theme. The majority of construction jobs are held by men.

Kuttner further insults human-service workers with his patronizing "carrot and stick" reasoning that Congress require that any human-service job supported "in part by federal funds would have to pay a professional wage and be part of a *career track*" [my emphasis]. Using his prevailing wage reasoning for construction workers, I would argue that the building trades continue to make good wages despite the actual de-skilling of the trades over time.

To say that human-service workers need to prove themselves worthy of good wages by seeking more education and training is unfair. To compare the human-service sector to the outdated and politically charged prevailing wage held by the unionized building trades is naïve at best and disingenuous at worst. It should be enough to say that human-service workers deserve to be paid a living wage and leave it at that.

LINDA MACDONALD
*East Weymouth, MA*

## Manufacturing Solutions

ALL THAT'S SAID IN THE articles in the May 2008 issue by Damon Silvers, Kevin Phillips, and Kuttner ["Fixing the Economy" series] and Kate Sheppard ["The Green Gap"] is true but insufficient. They miss a key manifestation of the increasing power of the speculative economy—the destruction of our productive capacity in manufacturing. And they miss the opportunities created by this crisis.

While we have lost many generally low-skilled jobs to offshore competition, thousands of companies remain that are focused on making complex, high-value-added products.

The majority of the 12,000 manufacturing companies in Chicago are small, privately held companies. Together these firms employ nearly 500,000 people, whose work, in turn, creates another 1.5 million jobs. These companies have largely shifted to making complex products that many export globally. Their employees must be highly skilled in technical fields and proficient in critical thinking and teamwork. These companies will lose 40 percent of their work force in the next 5 to 10 years due to the wave of baby-boom retirees. And it's in these companies that a lot of good "green" jobs for youth exist.

Many of these companies depend on an effective local public sector for their survival. As such, the consequences of our failing, and historically misdirected, public-education system ripple throughout the economy. We found, in a joint study with the Chicago Federation of Labor, that the major problem was the quality of public education. Education is only one part of what should be a package of policies and programs that build this sector and the essential public/private alliance that can make it an engine of development that is economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable.

DAN SWINNEY
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*Chicago, IL*

*Letters to the editor should be sent to letters@prospect.org or mailed to The Editors, The American Prospect, 2000 L St., NW, Suite 717, Washington, D.C. 20036.*

### FROM THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR

REPUBLICANS AND CONSERVATIVES ARE, TO STEAL A 45-year-old line from Tom Lehrer, beginning to feel like a Christian Scientist with appendicitis. A record-low percentage of Americans think well of them. Their presumptive presidential nominee has taken no position on any major issue with which a majority of Americans agree. They lose off-year elections in rock-solid Republican districts. What's a party to do?

In this month's cover story, *Prospect* columnist Mark Schmitt posits that the GOP has nothing left but identity politics—the politics of American-ness. With Republicans' brand of laissez-faire conservatism offering no answers to the nation's problems, cultural and racial identity is likely all Republican candidates have left to run on. And in our book review section, Princeton historian Sean Wilentz looks back to a time when conservatism was more vibrant, in part because it was not yet the sole tendency within Republican ranks.

The turn of the ideological wheel is also apparent in our essay by William Galston. Once the leading intellectual theorist of Bill Clinton's New Democrats, Galston now surveys the wreckage of the employment-based welfare state and concludes that the era of big government being over must itself be over, too—that only government can plausibly provide the safety net that the corporate employers of the 20th century once offered their employees. Ideological crashes and rebirths, in this month's *Prospect*.

— HAROLD MEYERSON



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# Up Front



## DOES JENNA SWING?

Is Jenna Bush—the blond half of the once hard-partying Bush twins—a swing voter? One of the horde of young women upon whom pollsters tell us the fate of the Democratic Party could depend this November? On *Larry King Live* in late April, the president's daughter, accompanying her mother for an interview about their new children's book, surprised Larry by saying that "of course" she would consider voting for a Democrat this election year. "Who isn't open to learning about the candidates?" she continued, as her mom sat by with a forced smile. Laura, for her part, had said that if compelled to choose between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama for president, she couldn't. "My favorite is the Republican," she insisted.

There's been evidence for some time that Jenna's apple fell at least a few feet left of the Bush tree. After college she taught low-income kids in a Washington, D.C., public charter school, and last year, she published a book about a young girl living with HIV/AIDS in Panama. In the book, *Ana's Story*, Jenna frankly supports comprehensive sex education and condom distribution, policies her dad firmly opposes. Here's hoping that Jenna's views influence her new husband, Virginia GOP scion Henry Hager, a former aide to Karl Rove. It's too late, alas, for her heresies to trickle up to President Pop.

### SHY MCCAIN

In a recent column, the newly punditized Karl Rove bemoaned John McCain's oh-so principled refusal to discuss his heroic war record. If only, Rove moaned, people *knew* just how noble and brave McCain is. Of course, back on planet Earth McCain has in fact run his entire campaign on the basis of his biography. One incident Rove discussed at length concerns a North Vietnamese prison guard who drew a cross in the sand in front of McCain as a discreet gesture of sympathy and faith. Never mind that the same exact event is described in one of McCain's numerous biographical Web-ads. Other ads reference different aspects of his captivity; far from being shy about his record, McCain practically has "I'm a war hero!" tattooed on his forehead. The Arizona senator even uses the font on the Vietnam War Memorial in his campaign logo.

So Karl Rove misrepresented facts for polemical purposes? We're just as shocked as you are.

### MARGINALIA

F. Scott Fitzgerald may have famously opined that there are no second acts in American lives, but he failed to account for the effect of third parties on second acts. Consider Alaska's Mike Gravel, who left the Democrats in March to seek the Libertarian Party nomination and who has argued that his status as a former U.S. senator gives him a leg up on other Libertarian candidates. "They'd had Ron Paul and Bob Barr," Gravel noted in an April interview. "Two congressmen do not make a senator. Four congressmen, maybe, make a senator, but not two congressmen." But Barr, who also is running for the Libs' presidential nod this year, and whom the libertarian *Reason* magazine reckoned "can capture some of the Ron Paul mojo and avoid the fringy appearance of the [2004 Libertarian presidential candidate Michael] Badnarik campaign," does have the advantage of having served in Congress in this century. (Gravel left the Senate when Jimmy Carter was president.) Elsewhere down the food chain, perennial candidate Ralph Nader, who declined to seek the Green Party's nomination and is soldiering on solo, has managed to raise $10,000 from 159 donors, according to his Web site. Alan Keyes, after losing the Constitution Party's nod to Chuck Baldwin in April, has collected 5,512 pledges of support for his own do-it-yourself campaign as of this



MIKE GRAVEL

ERIC PALMA; PAUL SANCYA / AP IMAGES



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**THE QUESTION: "WINE TRACK" IS PASSÉ. WHAT FOOD BETTER SYMBOLIZES THE ELITE?**

"The blood of the working class."
***—Eric Rauchway,*** *professor, University of California, Davis*

"After my first game at the new Washington Nationals stadium, I have to say hot dogs."
***—Michael Gehrke,*** *research director, Democratic National Committee*

"Organic caviar. It's certainly not arugula. The rich like to generate envy, and no one is jealous of salad."
***—Dr. Larry J. Sabato,*** *professor, University of Virginia*

writing. On the skid row of American politics, characters, as usual, abound.

### BEER UPSCALES

Is beer a beer-track drink anymore? Start with the rerouting of corn into ethanol, add soaring fuel prices and bad weather, mix in a fire in the warehouse holding a significant chunk of America's hops stock, and voilà! The price of hops, a key ingredient in beer-making, has risen by as much as 400 percent over the last year. Barley, another key ingredient, has increased by almost 45 percent. This all adds up to a crisis for beer-drinkers, brewers, and bratwurst cooks, but let's not forget the pundit class, which for four decades has persistently, and at times exclusively, relied on beer drinking to explain the class system in America. Long the journalistic shorthand for the mine-laboring, quiche-hating man on the street (they don't call him Joe Sixpack for his love of Coca-Cola), however, beer may soon be marketed at wine-like prices. The most familiar, well-worn political metaphor of our time could soon become about as relevant a signifier of economic status as the top hat, the monocle, or the full dinner pail.

This could, of course, force journalists to deal with issues of class more seriously.

Just kidding!

ADAM RADOSAVLJEVIC / FOTOLIA; CARLOS BARRIA / REUTERS / LANDOV

**PARODY** *by T. A. Frank*

***"No fewer than four McCain staffers and advisers mentioned as a possible vice-presidential pick the 36-year-old Louisiana governor, Bobby Jindal. They're tempted by the idea of picking someone so young. ... It might also be a way to confront the issue of McCain's age (71). ... The message would be: 'You want generational change? You can get it with McCain-Jindal'"***

—New York Times *columnist William Kristol, May 5, 2008*

**MEMO**

**FROM: McCain '08**
**TO: McCain '08**

Feedback for the Jindal idea has been positive, but our polling shows Sen. McCain to have vulnerabilities that go beyond mere age. Therefore, we must consider more vice-presidential remedies.

**ACTION ITEM:** When campaign staffers provide Bill Kristol with guidance for his column this week, please be sure to float some of the following vice-presidential pairings that we think might help, as it were, to "plug the ship."

**Sen. McCain and Raila Odinga**

In a change election, voters may perceive Sen. McCain as a somewhat white candidate, closely tied to Washington, and therefore failing to "turn the page." Prime Minister Odinga of Kenya, however, has not been corrupted by Washington and is entirely Kenyan, thus offsetting the opposition. As Kristol might want to phrase it: "You want half-Kenyan? You can get it with McCain-Odinga."

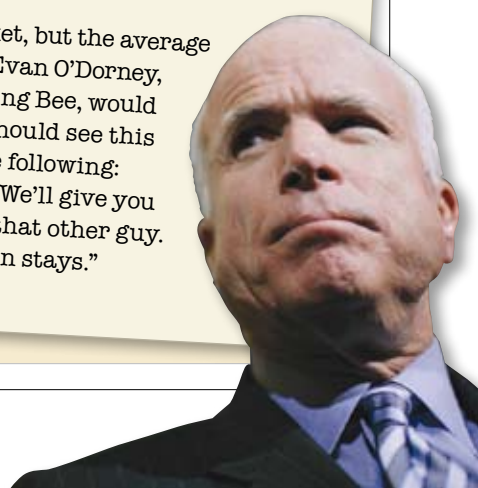
**Sen. McCain and Jallgor**

Since terrorism and the war in Iraq are major issues in this election, some voters have indicated reservations about Sen. McCain's inability to distinguish between Sunni and Shia Muslims. We do not presently know who "Jallgor" is, except that is the screen name of someone who left a comment on a blog saying, "I learned the difference between Shiite and Sunni when I was 15." With Jallgor on the ticket, Joe Lieberman would not need to stand by Sen. McCain to correct him. The pitch to Kristol's readers could be: "You want a president who knows the difference between Shiites and Sunnis? Look no further. Jallgor has known the difference for years. McCain-Jallgor is ready for office."

**McCain and Evan O'Dorney**

Gov. Jindal would bring youth and brains to the ticket, but the average age (53) would still be somewhat high. By contrast, Evan O'Dorney, 14, the 2007 champion of the Scripps National Spelling Bee, would bring the average age down to about 42. Plus, you should see this kid. He's really brainy. Kristol might try floating the following: "You want young? How about a speller? Just tell us. We'll give you whatever you damn people need to stay away from that other guy. How about a puppy? Just tell me. No, not that. McCain stays."

*T.A. Frank is an Irvine Fellow at the New America Foundation.*



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# Battle of the Budget Slide Shows

BY MARK SCHMITT

"SAVING OUR FUTURE REQUIRES TOUGH CHOICES today" may be a banal sentiment, but it's not an easy one to challenge. That is the headline on the "Fiscal Wake-Up Tour," a slide show created by David M. Walker, formerly head of the Government Accountability Office.

In hopes that it will be to the long-term budget deficit what Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" slide show has been to climate change, Pete Peterson has set aside a billion dollars out of his recent windfall from the Blackstone Group to fund Walker's national tour and like endeavors.

Walker, Peterson, and groups like the Concord Coalition solemnly inform audiences that the tough choices are as follows: Taxes raised to unimaginable levels. Economic crisis. Or, reduced spending on "entitlements," also known as "SocialSecurityMedicareMedicaid."

Entitlements are "blank checks," Walker tells audiences, "unfunded promises" to seniors, made unaffordable by the demographic certainties of an aging population. Will Marshall of the Democratic Leadership Council likens entitlements to a "doomsday machine."

Who would vote for blank checks and doomsday? Presenting the options in this way writes its own answer: Create a separate budget for entitlements, as recently proposed by a consortium of think tanks from the center to the far right. The fault is in "the budget decision process," they argue, because "it does not require that Congress and the president conduct a periodic review of how we are committing our limited resources across all of our competing priorities."

John McCain similarly calls for "entitlement reform" (which sounds more palatable than "slash Social Security"). And the idea that aging and demographics force decisions that should not be postponed is the common wisdom of every Tim Russert–wannabe and "sensible" editorial writer in the country.

In a quiet battle of PowerPoints, however, an alternative view has begun to emerge. It doesn't challenge the fact that on current projections the three big entitlement programs, plus interest on the federal debt, will within a few decades consume all federal revenues. But the alternative view argues that the problem is not "entitlements" but one program, Medicare, and to a lesser extent Medicaid. As Henry Aaron of the Brookings Institution asked in the title of a 2007 presentation: "Chronic Deficit: Entitlement Crisis? Or Health Financing Problem?"

"There is no entitlement crisis other than health care," Aaron answered. "There is no practical way to deal with public health-care spending other than by general health-care financing reform." The solution is not "entitlement reform" but health-care reform.

*There is no entitlement crisis other than health care.*

Aaron's conclusion rests on two points: First, while Medicare spending is affected by an aging population, most of the growth in Medicare costs arises from the increase in health-care costs per patient, which is many times more important than the increasing number of Medicare recipients. And second, rising health-care costs are not just a Medicare/Medicaid problem but involve the whole health-care system.

Aaron's argument demolishes the "Fiscal Wake-Up Tour's" obsession with blank checks and doomsday machines, but it doesn't offer a clear solution, either. One answer might be a global budget for health care, with certain services rationed or spending in the last year of life limited. McCain argues for "market-based solutions," claiming that putting people "in charge of their health-care dollars" will empower them to reduce costs, ignoring all evidence that it won't.

But in a third PowerPoint presentation that has been making the rounds in Washington, Peter Orszag of the Congressional Budget Office adds a new dimension to Aaron's argument: "Embedded in the nation's central long-term fiscal challenge," he argues, "appears to be a substantial opportunity: Can we reduce health-care costs without impairing health outcomes?"

Orszag has embraced the research from Dartmouth Medical School, popularized in Shannon Brownlee's recent book *Overtreated*, which shows that health-care spending, both public and private, varies wildly across the country and is unrelated to outcomes. Geographic variation in health-care spending has more to do with the habits and assumptions of doctors and hospitals in a particular region: In some areas, patients are more likely to be hospitalized or recommended for surgery, with no difference in outcomes. The opportunity Orszag sees is to reduce health-care spending, improve health outcomes, and resolve the long-term fiscal problem.

Of course, one person's wasteful spending is another person's income, so change will hardly be easy. Excess health spending is often the only thing creating jobs in certain regions or cities. But the combination of Aaron's and Orszag's insights is potentially revolutionary. By adding a new variable to the dreary old zero-sum game of the Fiscal Wake-Up Tour, it makes real choices possible. TAP



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# Pedal Pusher

BY DANA GOLDSTEIN

THIS SPRING, AS THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES were busy arguing over the advisability of lifting the gas tax for the summer months, I bought a bike. It was something I had been meaning to do since I first moved from Rhode Island to Washington, D.C., two years ago, when I sold the bumper sticker–clad Ford Escort that had taken me from my junior year of high school through college. I had real affection for that car, but selling it wasn't a difficult decision. Insurance payments would have taken a huge bite out of my entry-level paycheck, and I didn't relish the hassle of on-street parking. Ditching the Escort helped me feel fully committed to a new, urban lifestyle.

But as I quickly learned, car ownership remains the norm in D.C. Although a full 12 percent of District residents walk to work—the second highest rate in the nation after Boston—over two-thirds of Washington households own a car. Car-ownership rates have even risen in low-income communities, in part because they are less served by public transportation and taxis. Entire D.C. neighborhoods, such as Georgetown, are inaccessible via Metro, an otherwise excellent subway system. As a result, chores ranging from food shopping to furniture buying are more difficult here for the carless.

So one sunny day, I stopped by the local bike shop after work and walked out with a 24-gear hybrid, perfect for both commuting and recreation. In the weeks since, I've saved over $100 on bus and Metro fares; in just a few months, I'll recoup the entire cost of the bike. Even better, I've joined a tight-knit but growing group of bike-commuting enthusiasts. Fewer than half of 1 percent of American commuters bike to work; after all, many parents have to drop kids off at school, some folks have physical handicaps that make it impossible, and the explosion of outer-ring exurbs means many commutes are far too long to bike. But the average American commute remains just 25 minutes in length—bike-able for sure, given accessible streets.

In Washington, D.C., since 2000, the number of cycling commuters has risen by 50 percent to encompass 5 percent of all workers. Indeed, the city is becoming a national leader in decreasing traffic and pollution by encouraging cycling. In mid-May, the city rolled out a bike-sharing program called SmartBike, in partnership with, of all companies, Clear Channel Outdoor, the division of the radio giant dedicated to open-air advertising. For a $40 annual membership fee, SmartBike members can rent bikes at 10 kiosks throughout the city for up to the three hours at a time. Since 2000, the District has installed 700 bike racks and spent $10 million on paved bike trails. Public buses here even feature bike racks for fatigued riders looking to avoid the hills.

*In Washington, D.C., since 2000, the number of cycling commuters has risen by 50 percent to encompass 5 percent of all workers.*

But Washington and other American cities can do a lot more for cyclists, starting with making roads safer by decreasing gridlock. In New York state, Albany lawmakers thumbed their noses at city bikers (and the global warming crisis) when in April they rejected Mayor Michael Bloomberg's plan for congestion pricing in New York City. The policy would have taxed drivers for bringing their cars into midtown and downtown Manhattan on weekdays, clearing valuable street space and providing much-needed funds for public transportation. Cities should also do much more to ensure that safe bike paths and bike-sharing opportunities are available in every neighborhood, not just where the well-heeled live and work.

In addition to the health and environmental benefits, traversing city streets on a bike offers unique insight into the peculiar pathology of American automotive culture. Insulated from the wind, rain, sun, and every other aspect of the public space, many drivers are not just impatient with pedestrians and cyclists—they're angry. Beginning urban cyclists quickly learn the trick of "owning the lane"; if you're riding alongside the curb and don't want overeager cars to sideswipe you while attempting to pass, you simply shift toward the middle of the right lane, which also decreases the risk of being hit by the carelessly opened door of a parked car. This move, though a crucial safety measure and perfectly legal, can enrage motorists who get no pleasure out of their daily commutes. "Asshole!" one suited, middle-aged man screamed out his window as he swerved around me.

A few minutes later, I smirked as he and I found ourselves backed up behind the same red light. Passing a cyclist in rush hour traffic simply isn't going to save you that much time. But you know what will? Trading some of those gym hours and therapy sessions for stress-relieving, calorie-burning, good karma–earning bike rides. TAP



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# Can Identity Politics Save the Right?

*Fresh out of other options, the Republican Party's bid to regain power is likely to come in the form of a pander to "real Americans."*

**BY MARK SCHMITT**

There are two points at which a political party or an ideological faction can find its voice and begin to claim power. One, of course, is when it is at the height of confidence and electoral success, like Ronald Reagan's conservatives in 1981. The other is when it has hit bottom, when there's nothing more to lose, no constituencies to feed, no illusion that anything in the current strategy is working, no excuse for caution.

The Republican Party today is certainly not in the first position. But, with party identification favoring Democrats by the widest margin in 16 years, and Republicans losing even the battle for campaign money, the party may be close to the second. Parties in nonparliamentary, winner-take-all systems don't disappear. The recent resurgence of the British Conservative Party is a reminder that even after a decade of futility, a new leader, a vision, and impatience with the incumbent party can turn things around quickly. But for now, with Republican state parties in shambles, with no chance of reclaiming a congressional majority any time soon, and suffering, as former House Speaker Newt Gingrich warned, "a catastrophic collapse of trust," the GOP could be hitting that bottom, and grabbing desperately onto a frayed lifeline—the identity politics of American-ness—in a last bid for survival.

To appreciate the value of hitting bottom, consider what happened to the Democratic Party and liberalism. All through the Reagan and first Bush eras, and again in the Clinton years, Democrats always had *something*. The institutional heart of the party was in the House of Representatives, and during the Reagan era, the complacent assumption that "we'll always have the House" meant that many important Democratic figures didn't feel they had much stake in whether Michael Dukakis won the presidency or President Clinton succeeded. After the Gingrich takeover of Congress in 1994, the Democratic Party's purpose became identified with the personal survival and renewal of the Clinton presidency. Only after 2002, when the Democrats finally lost everything, when they reached the political equivalent of living in their car, did the path to renewal begin. Accelerated by the disaster of the war and awareness of their own complicity in it, enraged by the media and energized by new voices such as the "netroots" bloggers and the stellar candidates of 2006 and 2008, the Democrats proved that a party, and even its liberal wing, can turn things around almost completely in just four or six years.

The Republican Party, though, has always had a different attitude about risk, almost courting disaster while the Democrats postponed it. In *Building Red America*, his slightly belated 2006 opus on the Republican plan for permanent power, Thomas B. Edsall points to studies showing that core Republicans are "confident risk-takers"—white men with a very high tolerance for hazard. But as Edsall notes, they are so confident because they have been generally insulated from the consequences of their risk-taking—think of George W. Bush's career as an oil man, or of Bear Stearns, or of the quasi-celebrities whose messes are discreetly taken care of. And while conservative pundits and some of their politicians are in a state of panic, political strategists like Karl Rove carry themselves with the confident swagger of an investment banker who just lost $2 billion of someone else's money but still has the Fifth Avenue apartment and the house in Bedford. Rove's scheme to establish a 30-year reign of absolute Republican power increasingly looks like yet another gamble of the bubble economy, like a hedge-fund scheme that couldn't fail until it failed.

Whether it has a secret Swiss bank account of political capital or not, the Republican Party is not going away, and conservative ideas, despite their failure in practice, probably still have a hold on the American instinct. A fully ruined Republican Party could be as dangerous and consequential as one holding on to some scraps of power. But even if it retains the presidency, the party, and the conservative movement with which it became conjoined, faces deep structural problems—and the next moves are far from clear.

## THE DOWNFALL

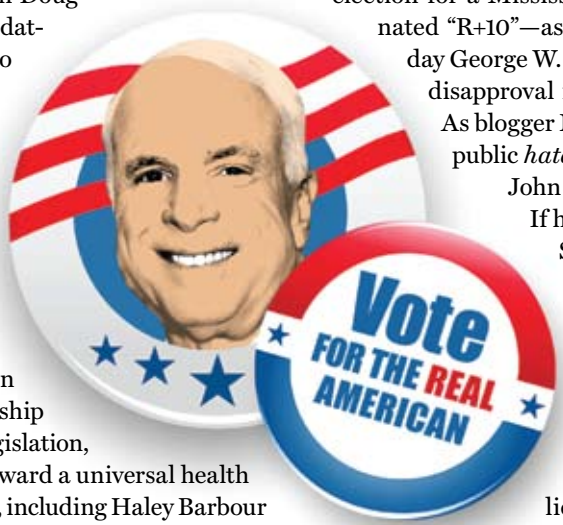
To understand the depth of the hole that the Republican Party finds itself in this year, set aside the presidential race for a moment and zoom out the map. The real secret of Republican success starting in 1994 and into this decade was not Newt Gingrich or Karl Rove—it was big-state Republican governors who were seen as successful in implementing actual conservative policies, from welfare reform to standards-based education reform to tax-cutting economics. In the late 1990s, you could start in Boston and drive out I-90 to Chicago, back up and



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down through the Northeast, mid-Atlantic, and upper Midwest, and with the idiosyncratic exception of Indiana, the governor's name on every "Welcome to ..." sign you passed would be that of a Republican, most likely popular and considered successful. Although much of that success was built on accounting fraud (Christine Todd Whitman, that means you), it was these Republican governors who made voters comfortable with the idea that conservative governance could work. Republican governors of the 1990s produced the senators (George Voinovich, Lamar Alexander), cabinet secretaries (Tom Ridge, Tommy Thompson, John Ashcroft), and the president of the current decade.

Today all this is gone. There are still 23 Republican governors, but of the big states in the Northeast and Midwest, only Minnesota is governed by a Republican. A handful of the 23 are considered successful, mostly because they have moderated their predecessors' conservatism—notably Charlie Crist of Florida, who reversed many of the barriers to voting set up by Jeb Bush and Katherine Harris. Arnold Schwarzenegger of California, M. Jodi Rell of Connecticut, and Jim Douglas of Vermont succeed by accommodating liberal Democratic legislatures to such a degree that it could be argued that they give Democratic legislators a little more courage, because the governors will share political responsibility for tax increases or other policies that might bring a backlash. (I grew up in Connecticut, and it's unquestionably a more reliably progressive state now than when it had Democratic governors in my youth, passing domestic-partnership and real campaign-finance reform legislation, raising the estate tax, and moving toward a universal health program.) A few other GOP governors, including Haley Barbour of Mississippi, Jon Huntsman of Utah, Mark Sanford of South Carolina, and Sarah Palin of Alaska, are considered successful conservatives but run states that are so solidly red that for purposes of the presidency and the Senate, their success has little external effect.




Future governors, members of Congress, and policy initiatives will emerge from state legislatures, but those, too, have been flipping to the Democrats. Of the 99 state legislative bodies, Democrats control 58 and Republicans 40 (Nebraska's single house is nonpartisan), and only seven states are fully controlled by Republicans. In several cases, the new Democratic majorities have been bolstered by waves of party-switching. These are numbers last seen in the 1980s, when Democratic legislative majorities included very conservative Democrats in the South.

At the national level, Democrats in the House of Representatives have a robust margin of 37, which is likely to grow. (Only four Democratic seats are currently considered toss-ups.) The Democratic majority in the next Senate is almost certain to be big enough that it will not have to depend on Joe Lieberman continuing to call himself a Democrat, and it could reach 56 or 57. Most notably, unlike the last Democratic majorities in the early 1990s, this one will not depend on the party's ultraconservatives. The most conservative Democrats today—Ben Nelson of Nebraska, Mark Pryor of Arkansas—are vastly more liberal than their predecessors and, not being from the Deep South, don't have one foot out of the party.

Significantly, these Democratic majorities at every level are unshakeable in November. There are only 11 gubernatorial elections this year, and only three of those are considered competitive. Only one Democratic Senate seat is in play, and even that incumbent, Louisiana's Mary Landrieu, has been strong in polls. Retirements, scandals, and strong recruiting give Democrats an advantage in Virginia, Colorado, New Hampshire, and several other states. While a few House Democrats who beat scandal-plagued Republicans in 2006 will have to struggle to hold on to those heavily Republican districts, a far larger number of Democrats are seeking to take the seats of retiring or weakened Republicans in districts trending Democratic. On April 22, a Democrat won the plurality of the vote in a special election for a Mississippi House seat in a district designated "R+10"—as Republican as it gets. On the same day George W. Bush set a new record for the highest disapproval rating ever recorded for a president. As blogger Matt Stoller wrote that evening, "The public *hates* Republicans."

John McCain may well win the presidency. If he does, though, it will not be because Stoller is wrong but because McCain is able to retain a reputation as somehow separate from the public's perception of the Republican Party—that he is honorable where the Party is corrupt, moderate where it is far right. A McCain victory will not in itself restore the Republican brand, although it may lay the foundation for a certain kind of comeback. While McCain's instincts are conservative, it's quite likely that a President McCain would look a lot like Gov. Schwarzenegger or Gov. Rell, with McCain having no alternative but to collaborate with a heavily Democratic legislative branch, perhaps being warmly received as a result. So while McCain might well win, and might even be deemed a moderately successful president, he will not do so by solving the deep structural problems of the post-Bush Republican Party and conservatism's decadent phase, but by divorcing himself from them.

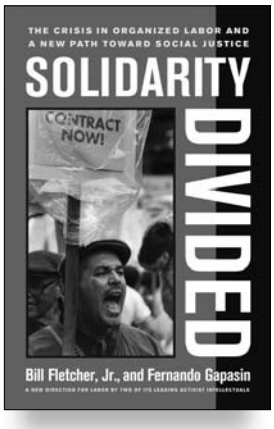
McCain may be able to leave the Republican Party and the conservative movement behind, but it remains to be seen whether the Republican Party can divorce itself from the failures of conservatism. In theory, of course, conservatives and Republicans are not the same, and one can succeed while the other fails. After all, it's only been a few decades that the Republican Party has been distinctly conservative. But much of the success of both in the last decades has been in their mutual embrace. Republican moderates like former Rep. Nancy Johnson of Connecticut chose to throw in their lot with conservatives like Gingrich not for reasons of ideology but

JOHN RITTER



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# Social Justice




## SOLIDARITY DIVIDED

The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice

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"Anyone concerned with the struggles of America's working people is going to be fascinated by this rare, insiders' look at the external forces and internal fumblings that have so drastically weakened the labor movement.... A deeply illuminating book."

**—Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Nickel and Dimed***



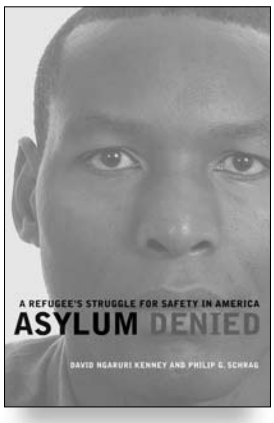

## NOT MUCH LEFT

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"Astonishing in its power to move and inform."***—Publishers Weekly***

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because they saw the conservatives' passion as the means to a reinvigorated, aggressive party. And the conservatives—who had at first succeeded by building institutions outside of the party—then threw themselves into it completely.

As a result, conservatism and the Republican Party now rise and fall together and cannot easily be disentangled. The Northeastern Republican moderates are now nearly extinct (Johnson was unseated in 2006), and conservatism has no other home. Bush, his administration, the Republican brand, and all but a few Republican officeholders are deeply unpopular and so is almost every aspect of conservative policy.

Conservatives like to construct an elaborate tale of betrayal in which the true faith can be restored by wresting it away from the unseemly ambitions of Republican politicians. But that story denies the reality that the downfall of both the party and the movement began on the very moment that Bush shed all the hedges and compromises—such as "compassionate conservatism" and the Medicare prescription drug benefit—and began to try to govern like a conservative. The Bush era ended two days after the 2004 re-election when Bush declared, "I earned ... political capital, and now I intend to spend it." Starting with the effort to privatize Social Security, everything went straight downhill. The rejection of the Republican Party came not because it failed conservatism but because conservatism failed.

### THE PATHS BACK TO POWER

Whether after a total defeat, losing both houses of Congress and the presidency for the first time in 16 years, or under the circumstances of a compromised, drifting McCain presidency, Republicans and conservatives will face the same question: How do they rebuild political power?

As Republican Party officials fade into insignificance (how many people would recognize the chairman of the Republican National Committee or even House Minority Leader John Boehner in an airport?), the face of the party becomes its pundits, bloggers, and former grandees like Gingrich, former Rep. Mickey Edwards, and Jack Abramoff–accomplice Grover Norquist. These Republicans are filling the bookstores with soon-to-be-remaindered titles like *Comeback*, *Grand New Party*, *Reclaiming Conservatism*, and *Heroic Conservatism*, all premised on one variation or another of the "we lost our way" theory.

Animating all these books is the idea of ideas or as they like to say, in a motto attributed to the agrarian conservative Richard Weaver, that "ideas have consequences." We have an intellectual history, conservatives often condescendingly tell liberals, while you just have feelings. "Conservatives won by out-researching, out-thinking, out-arguing, and out-smarting their opponents," former Bush speechwriter David Frum writes in *Comeback*, and lost their way when "conservatives began to argue that intellect no longer mattered to conservative politics."

The more specific ideas proposed in some of these books are mostly smart and palatable. If the intellectual commissars of the opposition party were Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam, who in *Grand New Party* propose supplementing a mild social conservatism with actual economic supports for



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**This year the Republican argument is reduced to its barest essence: The politics of the flag pin. This may be the ultimate high-stakes gamble for the party of confident risk-takers.**

fragile families, our political system would be nicely balanced. If former Rep. Mickey Edwards' call in *Reclaiming Conservatism* for a respectful constitutional libertarianism and a restoration of the balance of powers were the Republican ideology, I would think of the party as a sometimes useful check on the ambitions of liberalism. But most of these ideas are not what they claim to be: plans for renewing the party by anchoring it in a rediscovery of the moral absolutes of conservatism. Rather, they are purely improvisational, tactical positioning—attempts to meet the public demand for action on health care and climate change without accepting liberal solutions, much like the Bush Republicans' attempt to meet the demand for prescription-drug coverage under Medicare. These are elegant, short-term compromises disguised as ideology. Not that there's anything wrong with that. Dozens of similar prescriptions were written for the Democrats during the wilderness years and formed the basis for the Democratic Leadership Council, for Clinton's second-term triangulation, and for the cautious posturing of Vice President Gore and Democrats in the 2000–2002 period.

The difference is that all those proposals at least had parallels in the actual practice of Democratic politics. The Republican prescriptions exist in a hypothetical world, rather like the alternative historical fiction novels that Gingrich cranks out in between his visions of the future. "What if the Republicans had commonsense ideas?" is the new "What if the South had won the Civil War?"

If Republican politicians were testing these ideas on the campaign trail or in Congress, they might be of more than academic interest. Debates among the 11 initial Republican presidential candidates would have been expected to provide a forum for a range of ideas about the party's future. But it was not to be. A momentary glimmer of the Douthat/Salam theory was visible when Mike Huckabee talked about health care as a moral obligation, but he was so tied down by the most extreme version of the tax-cut agenda that he couldn't do anything with it. Mitt Romney briefly abandoned the laissez-faire economic dogma to speak of Republican investment in key fields, like green jobs and the auto industry, but those talking points expired as soon as they served their purpose of helping Romney win the Michigan primary, after which it was back to cutting taxes and doubling the size of Guantanamo Bay.

**ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE:** *Sean Wilentz reviews books on the future of conservatism on page 33.*

The eventual nominee, John McCain, brings nothing new to the table of political ideas, except for a uniquely militaristic view of American supremacy in the world. There is no philosophy of "McCainism" around which the election will revolve. Nor are there any up-and-coming Republican officials, with the possible exception of Gov. Crist of Florida, who take any of this reformist thinking seriously. Even Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota, whose phrase, "Sam's Club Republicans" inspired Douthat and Salam, is a conventional tax-cutter and social conservative. Rather than reconstructing a coherent philosophy out of their compromises, Republican politicians fall back on a mode of argument (modeled on Gingrich, its original master) that involves making occasional grand and ridiculous gestures toward supportive government—"a laptop for every child" or more recently, advocating legislation to ensure "more energy at lower cost with less environmental damage and greater national security"—followed by a quick return to the traditional bromides about tax cuts and entitlements. One admires the conservative writers for their resilient commitment to the idea that ideas matter, in the face of all evidence that in actual Republican politics, they've never mattered less.

The second path for Republican renewal is to use the opportunistic power of pure opposition, free from the responsibility to participate in governing the country. The Republican structure was always a machine better designed for opposition than for governance, and the unity-in-opposition of the early Clinton years is surely the moment for which conservatives are most nostalgic. They are geared up to destroy the next Democratic administration as soon as it comes forward with any kind of tax increase, a health-care proposal, an initiative on climate change, a plan to end the Iraq War, or anything related to guns or gays.

In the 16 months since the Democrats took over Congress, Bush has been able to hold the initiative in part by operating as the opposition party from within the White House, vetoing and threatening vetoes, casting every Democratic effort to end the war or limit warrantless surveillance as surrender. But whether McCain is president or not, by the natural rhythm of politics, it will be almost impossible to sustain the kind of disciplined, crafty opposition that allowed the Republicans to set the agenda from below as they did in 1993 or 2007. For one thing, there are far fewer Democrats who will play along or be as easily spooked as they were in 1993. For another, holding together absolute party unity will not be as easy this time. What's in it for Sens. Arlen Specter, Olympia Snowe, or Gordon Smith to join a vicious attack on a Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton health proposal, especially if it reflects some of their ideas? It doesn't help them in their states, it won't help them get any closer to a congressional majority, and it won't exactly brighten their legacy.

Pure opposition politics would be further complicated by the fact that the politics of taxes can no longer be cast in absolute terms. There is no possibility of extending all of the Bush tax cuts when they expire starting in 2010. There will be pressure immediately to work out a deal on the estate tax in par-



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ticular, and permanent repeal is no longer a possibility. So even though Republicans will yell about the "biggest tax increase in history," it will be a debate about the structure of that large tax increase, not about whether to increase taxes. If Democrats can master the congressional agenda, they can construct a package that continues tax cuts for the middle class while restoring fair treatment of capital gains and dividend income. Ever since George H.W. Bush's 1990 budget deal, which raised some taxes, Norquist and other conservatives have insisted on an absolute choice between raising taxes and cutting them. But when it becomes impossible to cast tax choices in such pure terms, the most powerful weapon in the Republican arsenal of opposition will be lifted from Republicans' hands.

### THE IDENTITY PANDER

That leaves Republicans with a single alternative, one that's embodied in the slogan of McCain's first general-election advertisement: "The American President Americans Are Waiting For." It's the politics of identity—not necessarily racial or ethnic identity but identity as an American. The blog FiveThirtyEight.com, which has been gathering all sorts of data relevant to the Electoral College vote, recently noted a fascinating demographic fact: About 7 percent of people refuse to answer the Census questions about ethnic origin and instead write in "American." Those defiant Americans are overwhelmingly found in the states and counties that turned away from the Democratic Party in 2000 and 2004—the Appalachian belt running from West Virginia through Kentucky, Tennessee, and southern Ohio—which are also the counties where Barack Obama has done worst in the primaries.

David Frum calls explicitly for this brand of identity politics, declaring that while the Republican Party's issue positions have evolved over the years, "there is one thing that has never changed: Republicans have always been the party of American democratic nationhood," whereas Democrats "attract those who felt themselves in some way marginal to the American experience: ... intellectuals, Catholics, Jews, blacks, feminists, gays—people who identify with the 'pluribus' in the nation's motto, 'e pluribus unum.'" In case it's not clear, in Frum's Latin, "pluribus" means "parasites," and he tells us helpfully, "As the nation weakens, Democrats grow stronger."

In Frum's book, this ugly bit of identity politics is carefully nestled within thousands of words about policy. And this is how the code is supposed to work. The GOP's attack on "liberals" was always an attack on people not quite like "Americans"—secular, cosmopolitan, educated, egalitarian. When Republicans went after Michael Dukakis for his policies on crime, they weren't just saying his policies were bad. They were saying, he's not like us; he's a cold-blooded, academic mush-brain who wouldn't give his kids a whupping if they needed it.

The politics of American-ness needs to be cloaked in policy, simply because it's unpalatable otherwise. Without the helpful crutches of symbolic issues like welfare, crime, and immigration, the raw edges of the politics of people-not-like-us would be a little too uncomfortable, and not just for those of us who fall into one or more of the "pluribus" categories. But thanks to the unlikely trio of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and John McCain, the usual game is impossible. Clinton took welfare and crime off the political agenda. Bush made global belligerence and eternal tax cuts unpalatable. And McCain's inconvenient position on immigration takes away what Republicans last fall were dreaming would be their silver bullet. As a result, with Americans saying they are willing to pay more taxes for health care and better schools, with Republicans at a disadvantage in the polls on *every single issue*, there is no respectable costume in which to dress up identity politics.

Traditionally, the phrase "identity politics" has referred to the Democratic coalition's caucuses, interest groups, and competitive claims of wrongs to be righted and rights to be granted. Identity politics on the left, according to this very conventional wisdom, opened the door to an alternative politics of national identity on the right. And yet in 2008, the Democratic presidential nomination battle between an African American and a woman has not exacerbated left identity politics but brought it to a peaceful close. Obama is not Jesse Jackson; Hillary Clinton is not former Rep. Pat Schroeder. He chose to campaign on national reconciliation, she on bread-and-butter economics and her expertise on military affairs. Whereas McCain—a man whose known positions on the war and on the economy are deeply unpopular, whose other positions are endlessly shifting, whose party and ideology are rejected—is recast entirely in terms of his biography, his honor, his character, his American-ness.

This year the Republican argument is reduced to its barest essence: Americans versus "pluribus," unprotected by the politeness of issues or safer symbolism. Hence McCain's slogan, the politics of the flag pin, the e-mails charging that Obama doesn't salute the flag, and the attempt to associate him with the anti-American politics of 1968, when he was 7 years old. This, then, may be the ultimate high-stakes gamble for the party of confident risk-takers: Accept that everything else—ideas, competence, governance—is gone, and instead of trying to reconstruct it, as the books recommend, bet everything on the bare essentials of Republican identity politics, "The American President Americans Are Waiting For."

If it works, it will be in part because we—by which I mean the media and many Democrats—believe it will. We are easily spooked by the confident swagger of the Republicans, who not so long ago were plotting permanent world domination. But then, so was Bear Stearns.

If it fails, the Republican Party will be left with nothing. It will be a regional party, with no hold on government, no up-and-coming generation of politicians, no noble ideas which might have their day again. For Republicans, that may be the better result. It might take a decade, but like the British Conservatives, one day a new leader will emerge, read the books about reforming conservatism, embrace a new vision, and rebuild a party that can compete for power without trying to monopolize it. **TAP**

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***Mark Schmitt*** *is a senior fellow at the New America Foundation and a senior correspondent for* The American Prospect.



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# Offshoring Silicon Valley

*American computer software engineers go the way of factory workers.*

**BY STEVEN GREENHOUSE**

*In* The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker, *Steven Greenhouse, the veteran* New York Times *labor writer, provides a panoramic picture of American workers struggling with an economic order that demands more of them while offering them less—less income, less security, less leisure time, less dignity—in return. One of the sectors he reports on—high-tech—was supposed to be one part of the economy where American workers could still flourish. Over the past decade, however, that has proven not to be the case.* —HAROLD MEYERSON

The e-mail seemed innocent enough, but something about it worried Myra Bronstein. It instructed her and the 17 other quality-assurance engineers—a fancy term for software testers—to report to the company's boardroom the next morning. *No way that can be good*, she told herself.

At the time, Myra, then 47, was a senior quality-assurance engineer at WatchMark, a company that developed sophisticated software for cell phone companies. She and the other quality-assurance engineers were a dedicated lot. Sometimes they worked 11 or 12 days straight, sometimes up to 18 hours a day, as WatchMark rushed to meet deadlines to get new software to customers. WatchMark, based in Bellevue, a Seattle suburb, made software that helped wireless companies determine whether their cell towers were working properly and how many calls were being dropped.

Myra remembers one episode when, after being required to work 24 hours in a row testing software, she told her boss that she had to leave for a long-scheduled doctor's appointment. Her boss yelled at her, accusing her of lacking dedication.

"If they wanted to wreck our weekends or cancel our vacations," Myra says, "they'd basically say, 'This is a very important release. We need to build this customer's confidence. We have to show them it's good quality, and we need you to work, and basically if we lose this customer we could fold.' They'd say, 'As long as we're in business, you have a job, so it's in your best interest to work as hard as you can—weekends, evenings, everything.'"

Myra is a petite woman, deliberate and not at all showy. She has a reserved smile, a pale, almond-shaped face, deep-set eyes, and thick, dark hair that just touches her shoulders. As Myra and other quality-assurance engineers gathered in the boardroom the morning after the e-mail arrived, the director of human resources began giving out large manila envelopes. Once everyone was there, Myra recalls, "The head of HR said, 'Unfortunately, we're having layoffs, and you're in the room because you're being impacted by the layoffs.'"

The 18 engineers were dumbstruck, but the head of human services pressed on. "Your replacements," she continued, "are flying in from India, and you're expected to train them if you are going to receive severance."

"People were trying not to cry," Myra says. "We felt sucker-punched. It totally knocked the wind out of me. I had bought into all their motivational tactics. I felt if I helped my company stay afloat, I would ensure my own employment. I believed them."

Uncomfortably, reluctantly, Myra and the others agreed to WatchMark's request to train their replacements beginning the following Monday. They would train their replacements for four to eight weeks and would then receive two months' severance pay. Not to agree would have meant working just a few more days and not receiving any severance.

The following Monday morning, the American engineers gathered inside a conference room, waiting to meet the 20 engineers who had been flown in from India. WatchMark's director of quality assurance began that meeting ever so clumsily by saying, "I'd like my new team to meet my old team."

Once each quality-assurance engineer was assigned an Indian to train—Myra was assigned two—WatchMark's vice president of technology began a pep talk, telling the laid-off engineers, "The future welfare of WatchMark depends on how well you train these people."

For the next two months, Myra strained to maintain her composure as she trained two Indians at once. "They didn't acknowledge what was going on, that we had to do something upsetting," she says. "It was the most difficult situation in the world."

Soon, Myra and the other Americans began calling themselves "The Castaways" and "Dead Man Working." She was told that the Indians would earn $5,000 a year; she had earned $80,000.

**THE RISE OF HIGH-TECH,** some experts predicted, was to be the salvation for America's economic ills and beleaguered workers. And in the late 1990s, the high-tech boom did in fact do wonders for the economy, helping to reduce the jobless rate to its lowest level in decades to lift real wages at their fastest clip in recent memory. But the high-tech bubble burst in 2000,



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**High-Tech, Low-Wage:** IBM, Hewlitt-Packard, and other foreign companies have flocked to cities like Dalian, China, to set up software facilities.

and now it seems that if high-tech is going to be a salvation for anyone, it will be for workers in Bangalore and Beijing.

"Profits, Not Jobs, on the Rebound in Silicon Valley," read the headline of a *New York Times* story in the summer of 2005. Profits at Silicon Valley's seven largest companies had more than quintupled the three previous years, while employment in the valley had declined by nearly 20,000 during the same period. In contrast, during the high-tech boom from 1995 to 1997, Silicon Valley added more than 82,000 jobs. The *Times* story focused on Wyse Technology, a respected producer of computer terminals, whose sales and profits were soaring and whose job growth was taking place overseas. In 2005, Wyse added 100 workers in India and 35 in China, increasing its worldwide work force to 380, but Wyse's employment in California remained flat. Just 15 percent of Wyse's engineering talent remained in America.

Another *Times* story that summer was headlined, "Cutting Here, but Hiring Over There." The story began, "Even as it proceeds with layoffs of up to 13,000 workers in Europe and the United States, IBM plans to increase its payroll in India this year by more than 14,000 workers."

These news stories point to a growing disconnect between what's good for American corporations and what's good for American workers. These stories also demonstrate that high-tech will not be a salvation for many American job seekers in the future unless the United States develops some revolutionary new technologies that spawn large new industries.

When factory jobs were heading overseas in the 1980s, young Americans were told there would be plenty of high-paying high-tech jobs to replace the jobs that disappeared. Then in the early 1990s, many companies moved their computer-chip production overseas, and we were told the good software jobs would remain in America. Now many of those software jobs are moving overseas, fueled by some stark numbers. American software engineers start at $75,000 a year, while many in India start at $15,000.

One respected consulting firm, Forrester Research, estimates that 3.4 million white-collar jobs will be sent offshore between 2003 and 2015. Tax returns once prepared by accountants in New York or Los Angeles are now being prepared in the Philippines. Radiologists in India are reviewing X-rays e-mailed from the United States. Paralegals in India are helping budget-minded law firms in Chicago and Seattle prepare wills and contracts. Forrester Research estimates that from 2003 to 2015, the offshoring exodus will include 542,000 computer jobs, 259,000 management jobs, 191,000 architectural jobs, 79,000 legal jobs, and 1.6 million back-office jobs.

Offshoring may produce other perils as well. Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel Prize–winning economist and professor at Columbia University, says, "What worries me is that [offshoring] could have an enormous effect on wages, and that could have a wrenching impact on society." Offshoring has already held down wages of software workers up and down the West Coast. At a Sprint call center in North Carolina, 180 customer-service representatives, scared that their jobs would be shipped abroad, accepted a pay freeze for 2004 and no definite increase in 2005.

Three Harvard economists—George J. Borjas, Richard B. Freeman, and Lawrence F. Katz—found that for every 1 percent that employment falls in a manufacturing industry because of imports or operations moving overseas, wages are depressed by five-tenths of 1 percent for the workers who remain. With Forrester Research predicting that 6 percent of service-sector jobs will be sent offshore by 2015, Katz estimates that wages for service-sector workers in vulnerable fields could be shaved by 2 percent to 3 percent as a result. "White-collar workers have a right to be scared," Katz says.

Paul Samuelson, the famed Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist, textbook writer, and Nobel Prize winner, has warned that if American companies shift too many high-tech jobs and too much high-tech expertise to India, China,

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**"Your replacements," the head of human services said, "are flying in from India, and you're expected to train them if you are going to receive severance."**

and other developing nations, that could ultimately undercut American industry and reduce the nation's per capita income. Samuelson also warns of a downward effect on worker pay, saying, "If you don't believe that [offshoring] changes the average wages in America, then you believe in the tooth fairy."

Indeed, more and more economists are voicing fears that if American technology companies continue to send so much of their work and expertise overseas, that might someday enable India's and China's high-tech industries to outinvent, outthink, and outstrip America's high-tech industry in some key areas, leaving the United States at a costly disadvantage in a field of critical importance.

**AFTER TWO MONTHS** of training her replacement, Myra was unemployed. That was the last thing she would have anticipated when, full of lofty expectations, she quit her job as a health inspector in Kansas City to pursue a degree in electrical engineering. She hungered for a job that promised more excitement, more money, and more mobility. "At the time, computer science fit all those criteria," she says.

After obtaining her engineering degree, she landed a job with AT&T in Naperville, Illinois, testing its electronic switching systems. Four years after Myra began, AT&T started downsizing in Naperville, so she transferred to AT&T's operation in Middletown, New Jersey. For her first four years there, she wrote user manuals about telephone systems, and then she transferred into software testing. There, Myra was surprised by how many young engineers from India were brought in on H-1B visas. After four years, she was the only Caucasian left in the 20-person testing unit. "The writing was on the wall," Myra said.

Worried that she would be replaced, Myra quit and moved to Seattle, a city for which she long had a romantic hankering. There she took the testing job with WatchMark, and three years later came the abrupt layoffs. Myra remained unemployed for three months before settling for a job at what she called "a testing sweatshop." It paid $20 an hour, half the rate she earned at WatchMark (which has since changed its name to Vallent and been acquired by IBM). Myra's new testing company was across the street from a sewage treatment plant, and in the summer, the workers complained that they were choking from the smell, the heat, and the lack of ventilation. In winters, there was so little heat that many workers wore their coats all day.

"One day it was raining a lot, and I was sitting there at my PC, testing software for bugs, and it started dripping from the ceiling, right into my PC. Before I had time to react, it exploded. Smoke was coming out of it. That was some bug all right."

She soon quit.

Seeing so many jobs being offshored to India, Myra grew convinced that it would be hard to find a high-tech job that paid nearly as much as her WatchMark job. She searched in vain for several more months, supporting herself by drawing down her 401(k) and selling off her beloved, painstakingly assembled collection of antique Guilloche cosmetic compacts—fine French-made enamel compacts, some of which had silver handles.

Feeling forsaken by the high-tech world, Myra moved back to Kansas City, in large part to take care of her ailing 86-year-old mother.

"I'm giving up on the technology field, because it's so difficult to survive now that employers can use so much cheap, skilled labor overseas," she says.

Myra is now contemplating a radical career change. She is thinking of becoming a pharmacist, which would entail six years of school. But she has no idea how she would afford the tuition. The Trade Adjustment Assistance Act pays tuition for factory workers who lose their jobs to globalization, but Myra was a software worker, not a factory worker.

"I would never have gone into the technology field in the first place if I had a crystal ball and knew the bottom was going to drop out," Myra said. "People who are staying in this field have to go back to school and continually learn more complicated high-tech things. I thought I could be very competent and learn what I needed to know about my own job and serve the company well. But now they want much more from you for much less."

**IN TODAY'S BRAVE NEW WORLD** of offshoring, no one seems sure where to run for safety. Getting a college degree, especially a degree in computer engineering, used to be the ticket to job security. But as Harvard's Richard Freeman has pointed out, the world has changed mightily because hundreds of millions of workers in India and China, not to mention in Russia, Hungary, and other Soviet Bloc countries, have joined the global work force and are eager to take over work long done by Americans—including highly educated Americans. This has made it hard to advise American college students about what careers to prepare for.

In a candid moment, Craig Barrett, chairman of Intel, a company that does research and manufacturing in many different nations, voiced concern that globalization will portend a dimmer future for young Americans: "Intel will be okay no matter what," Barrett said. "We can adjust our R&D and manufacturing wherever it is most economically advantageous to do so. But in addition to being chairman of Intel, I am also a grandfather, and I wonder what my grandchildren are going to do." **TAP**

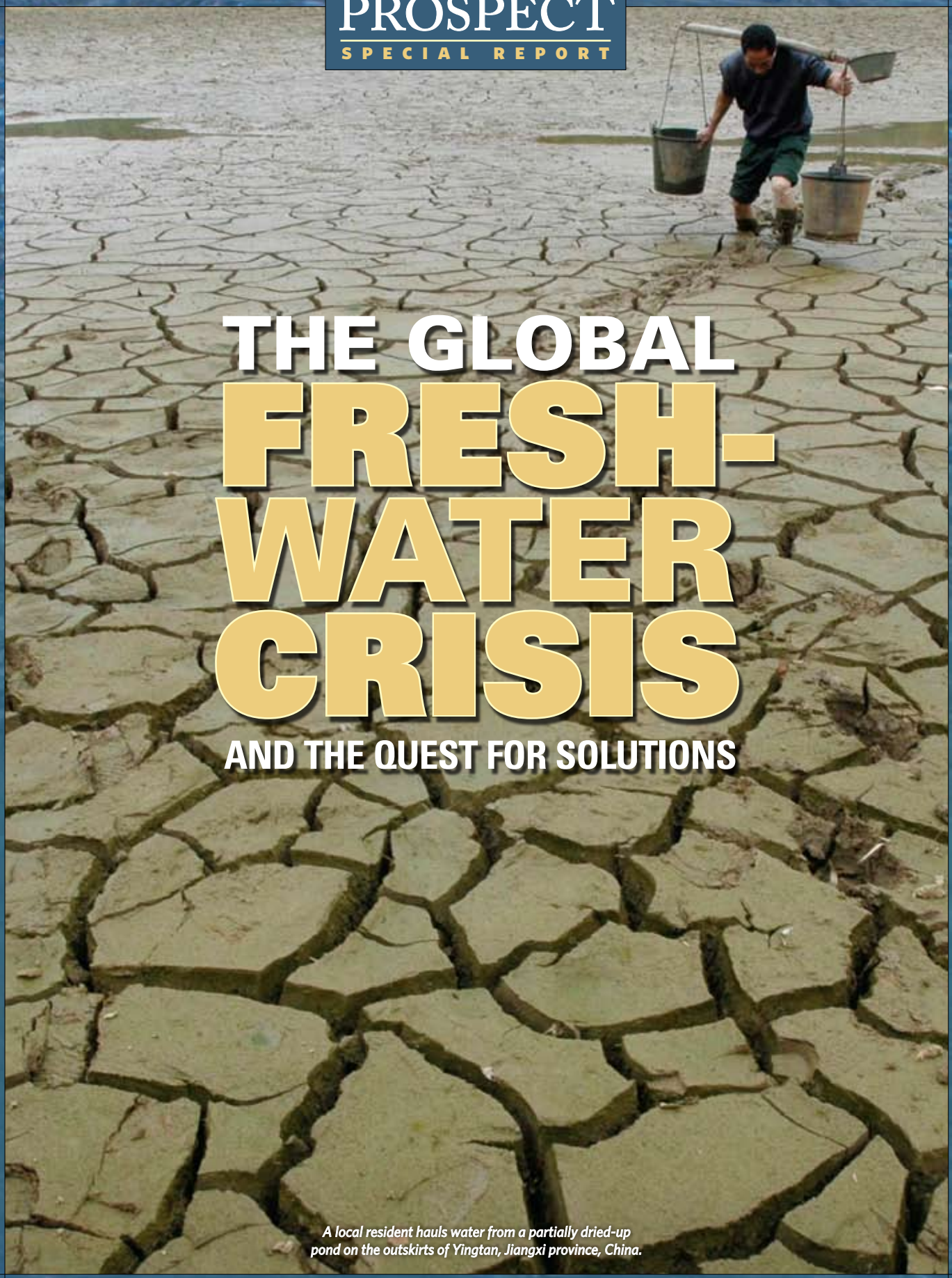
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***Steven Greenhouse*** *has been the labor and workplace correspondent for* The New York Times *since 1995. This article is adapted from his new book,* The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker, *published this spring by Alfred A. Knopf. Reprinted here with permission.*



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THE AMERICAN PROSPECT
SPECIAL REPORT



# THE GLOBAL FRESH-WATER CRISIS

## AND THE QUEST FOR SOLUTIONS

*A local resident hauls water from a partially dried-up pond on the outskirts of Yingtan, Jiangxi province, China.*

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## The Global Freshwater Crisis and the Quest for Solutions


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**THIS SPECIAL REPORT** of *The American Prospect* addresses a stark reality: Great expanses of the globe are literally running out of fresh, safe water, a threat accelerated by climate change and the pressures of unremitting development and population growth. Recent headlines about trace pharmaceuticals in our drinking water and spikes in food prices have focused our attention momentarily. Now, the dimensions of the world's water crisis must focus us for good and prod us toward lasting solutions.
—*THE EDITORS*


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# Where Has All the Water Gone?

*The world's water crisis poses grave threats to our survival. Can we change course?*

**BY MAUDE BARLOW**

**THREE SCENARIOS COLLUDE TOWARD** disaster. Scenario one: The world is running out of freshwater. It is not just a question of finding the money to hook up the 2 billion people living in water-stressed regions of our world. Humanity is polluting, diverting, and depleting the Earth's finite water resources at a dangerous and steadily increasing rate. The abuse and displacement of water is the ground-level equivalent of greenhouse-gas emissions and likely as great a cause of climate change.

Scenario two: Every day more and more people are living without access to clean water. As the ecological crisis deepens, so too does the human crisis. More children are killed by dirty water than by war, malaria, HIV/AIDS, and traffic accidents combined. The global water crisis has become a powerful symbol of the growing inequality in our world. While the wealthy enjoy boutique water at any time, millions of poor people have access only to contaminated water from local rivers and wells.

Scenario three: A powerful corporate water cartel has emerged to seize control of every aspect of water for its own profit. Corporations deliver drinking water and take away wastewater; corporations put massive amounts of water in plastic bottles and sell it to us at exorbitant prices; corporations are building sophisticated new technologies to recycle our dirty water and sell it back to us; corporations extract and move water by huge pipelines from watersheds and aquifers to sell to big cities and industries; corporations buy, store, and trade water on the open market, like running shoes. Most important, corporations want governments to deregulate the water sector and allow the market to set water policy. Every day, they get closer to that goal. Scenario three deepens the crises now unfolding in scenarios one and two.

Imagine a world in 20 years in which no substantive progress has been made to provide basic water services in the Third World; or to create laws to protect source water and force industry and industrial agriculture to stop polluting water systems; or to curb the mass movement of water by pipeline, tanker, and other diversions, which will have created huge new swaths of desert.

Desalination plants will ring the world's oceans, many of them run by nuclear power; corporate-controlled nanotechnology will clean up sewage water and sell it to private utilities, which will in turn sell it back to us at a huge profit; the rich will drink only bottled water found in the few remaining uncontaminated parts of the world or sucked from the clouds by corporate-controlled machines, while the poor will die in increasing numbers from a lack of water.

This is not science fiction. This is where the world is headed unless we change course—a moral and ecological imperative. But first we must come to terms with the dimension of the crisis.

### WE ARE RUNNING OUT OF FRESHWATER

In the first seven years of the new millennium, more studies, reports, and books on the global water crisis have been published than in all of the preceding century. Almost every country has undertaken research to ascertain its water wealth and the threats to its aquatic systems. Universities around the world are setting up departments or cross-departmental disciplines to study the effects of water shortages. The Worldwatch Institute has declared: "Water scarcity may be the most underappreciated global environmental challenge of our time."

PAGE A1 PHOTO: REUTERS / LANDOV




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From these undertakings, the verdict is in and irrefutable: The world is facing a water crisis due to pollution, climate change, and surging population growth of unprecedented magnitude. Unless we change our ways, by the year 2025 two-thirds of the world's population will face water scarcity. The global population tripled in the 20th century, but water consumption went up sevenfold. By 2050, after we add another 3 billion to the population, humans will need an 80 percent increase in water supplies just to feed ourselves. No one knows where this water is going to come from.

Scientists call them "hot stains"—the parts of the Earth now running out of potable water. They include northern China, large areas of Asia and Africa, the Middle East, Australia, the Midwestern United States, and sections of South America and Mexico.

The worst effects on people are, of course, in those areas of the world with large populations and insufficient resources to provide sanitation. Two-fifths of the world's people lack access to proper sanitation, which has led to massive outbreaks of waterborne diseases. Half of the world's hospital beds are occupied by people with an easily preventable waterborne disease, and the World Health Organization reports that environmental factors, including contaminated water, are implicated in 80 percent of all sickness and disease worldwide. In the last decade, the number of children killed by diarrhea exceeded the number of people killed in all armed conflicts since World War II. Every eight seconds, a child dies from drinking dirty water.

Meanwhile, some wealthier countries are just beginning to understand the depth of their own crises. Many parts of the United States are experiencing severe water shortages. Pressure is mounting on the governors in the Great Lakes region to open up access to the lakes to the burgeoning mega-cities around the basin. In 2007, Lake Superior, the world's largest freshwater lake, dropped to its lowest level in 80 years. Florida is in trouble, trying to keep its fast-spreading lawns and golf courses green. California has a 20-year supply of freshwater left. New Mexico has only 10. And Arizona is out: It now imports all of its drinking water. Experts assert that this is more than a cyclical "drought": Major parts of the United States are running out of water. In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency warns that if current water use continues unchecked, 36 states will suffer water shortages within the next five years.

## HOW DID WE GET HERE?

We were all taught certain fundamentals about the Earth's hydrologic cycle in grade school. There is, we learned, a finite amount of available freshwater on the planet, and it makes its way through a cycle that ensures its safe return to us for our perpetual use. In the hydrologic cycle, water vapor condenses to form clouds. Winds move the clouds across the globe, spreading the water vapor. When the clouds cannot hold the moisture, they release it in the form of rain or snow, which either seeps into the ground to replenish groundwater or runs off into lakes, streams, and rivers. As these processes happen, the power of the sun causes evaporation, changing liquid water into vapor to renew the cycle. In this scenario, the planet could never "run out" of water.

**At current usage rates, 36 states will suffer water shortages within five years.**

But this cycle, true for so many millennia, did not take into account modern humans' collective capacity for destruction. In the last half-century, the human species has polluted surface waters at an alarming rate. The world may not exactly be running out of water, but it is running out of clean water. Ninety percent of wastewater produced in the Third World is discharged, untreated, into local rivers, streams, and coastal waters. As well, humans are now using more than half of accessible runoff water, leaving little for the ecosystem or other species.

## OUR POLITICAL LEADERS ARE FAILING US

The freshwater crisis is easily as great a threat to the Earth and humans as climate change (to which it is deeply linked) but has had very little attention paid to it in comparison. It is like a comet poised to hit the Earth. If a comet really did threaten the entire world, it is likely that our politicians would suddenly find that religious and ethnic differences had lost much of their meaning. Political leaders would quickly come together to find a solution to this common threat.

However, with rare exceptions, average people do not know that the world is facing a comet called the global water crisis. And they are not being served by their political leaders, who are in some kind of inexplicable denial. The crisis is not reported enough in the mainstream media, and when it is, it is usually reported as a regional or local problem, not an international one.

Every day, the failure of our political leaders to address the global water crisis becomes more evident. Every day, the need for a comprehensive water-crisis plan becomes more urgent. If ever there were a moment for all governments and international institutions to come together to find a collective solution to this emergency, it is now. If ever there were a time for a plan of conservation and water justice to deal with the twin water crises of scarcity and inequity, it is now. The world does not lack the knowledge about how to build a water-secure future; it lacks the political will.

This, then, is the task: nothing less than reclaiming water as a commons for the Earth and all people that must be wisely and sustainably shared and managed if we are to survive. This will not happen unless we are prepared to reject the basic tenets of market-based globalization. The current imperatives of competition, unlimited growth, and private ownership when it comes to water must be replaced by new imperatives—those of cooperation, sustainability, and public stewardship. **TAP**

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***Maude Barlow*** *is head of the Council of Canadians. This article is adapted from her new book,* Blue Covenant, *published by The New Press © 2007. Reprinted here with permission.*



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# Water Wisdom

*A conversation with water expert Peter H. Gleick on today's crisis, and a vision for tomorrow's sustainability*

**BY ROGER D. STONE**

**RECENTLY I VISITED WATER EXPERT** Peter Gleick at the Oakland, California, headquarters of the Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, and Security, where he is president and co-founder. A MacArthur Fellowship award winner for his work on water issues, Dr. Gleick has been a practitioner in the field for some 20 years. His institute's work can be found at www.pacinst.org and www.worldwater.org. Some highlights of our conversation:

**RS: In your book *Water in Crisis*, published in 1993, you said that water was going to be a major challenge for the world for the coming century. Well, here we are well into that coming century. Are things now better or worse than you thought they would be?**

**PG:** I do think there is a water crisis. There are still more than a billion people who don't have access to safe drinking water, and 2 and a half billion people, or so, without access to adequate sanitation. Two million people a year die of water-related diseases that are preventable, curable, unnecessary. And that, by itself—what I describe as a failure to meet basic human needs for water—is a crisis. Sometimes the word is overused, but not in my opinion in this case.

The good news is that there's growing attention to water by the public, by politicians, by scientists, by academics. And that's leading to new efforts to use water more efficiently, to think about incorporating ecosystems into water planning and management. There are many good examples of political cooperation over water. All around the world we're seeing bits and pieces of what, if taken altogether, is a sustainable strategy of what I call a soft path to water.

**RS: Are industrial users becoming interested in the soft path?**

**PG:** Yes. At the Pacific Institute we spend a lot of time looking at water-efficiency potential across the board. In the 1920s, it took 200 tons of water to make a ton of steel. Today, the best steel plants in the world use 2 or 3 tons of water to make a ton of steel. That's a 99 percent reduction. In general, the drumbeat from industry used to be, "Oh, we can't comply with these environmental regulations, they're too expensive." But the reality has turned out to be that they made these industries more efficient, and made the environment cleaner. Everybody benefited. The steel industry would have died a slow, horrible death in the United States. Instead, it was fundamentally restructured.

Other smart, innovative industries get it, and they get it early, and they reduce their environmental footprints, in every aspect—energy, environment, water, toxics—and it's to their credit that they do so. They don't want to get in trouble with their consumers. They don't want to have people badgering them to measure their water footprint. They want to get ahead of the problem.

**RS: Global warming in many respects is making matters worse in the water world. What sort of response can we expect?**

**PG:** It's sometimes a little depressing to look back and see how little progress we have made in getting water managers to understand the true risks of climate change. I do think the debate about climate change itself is over. The next step is integrating that understanding into changes in the way we manage water. It is still happening very slowly—too slowly in my opinion. But it is happening. We are, especially in the Western United States, coming to the realization that tomorrow's climate is going to be different from yesterday's climate and that we're going to have to manage our complex water system for that new reality.

**RS: What about money issues?**

**PG:** It takes less money to meet basic human needs for water than the economic cost of not meeting those needs—in terms of health, lost work days, lost education opportunities for girls and women in the developing world. The faster we understand that, the less we'll complain about how much is involved.

People are willing to pay for water that meets their needs, and I think that's key to a lot of this.

I also believe that the economic models we've used in the past—the role of the World Bank and the big international funding agencies—are not going to get us to the solutions we need. In particular, while there is a need for some big, expensive infrastructure, there's also a desperate need for much smaller-scale investments: at the village level, on the individual level, at the community level. The World Bank is very good at spending a billion dollars in one place, but they're

## FRESHWATER FACTS

- **NEARLY 97 PERCENT** of the world's 362 trillion gallons of water are saltwater or otherwise undrinkable. Another **2 PERCENT** is held in ice caps and glaciers.
- **1/3 OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION** lives in countries with moderate to high water stress with disproportionately high impacts on the poor.
- **AT LEAST 1 BILLION PEOPLE** must walk three or more hours to obtain drinking water.
- Although **60 PERCENT** of the world's population lives in Asia, the continent has only **36 PERCENT** of the world's water resources.
- **40 PERCENT** of U.S. rivers are too polluted for fishing, swimming, or aquatic life. Even worse are the lakes at **46 PERCENT.**
- Groundwater can stay polluted for **SEVERAL THOUSAND YEARS.**



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Tsolo, South Africa

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not good at spending a million dollars in a thousand places—or a thousand dollars in a million places. That requires a new model of financing, and one that the World Bank and organizations like [it] are not capable of addressing.

**RS: How about technology? We do have better-engineered desalination capabilities, drip irrigation, and other refinements of agricultural watering. Do techno-fixes represent a solution to the problem?**

**PG:** Just as education is important, just as regulatory policies are important, just as proper economics is important, there's a critical role for technology. I think technology for water is going to be a little different in the coming years than it has been in the past when we focused on large-scale central models. Increasingly we are going to see smart irrigation technology, smart appliances in our homes, more effective local desalination is a possibility, new technologies for treating and reusing waste water are going to be key. All of those things have a role to play.

**RS: On reorganizing the bureaucracies to cope with all this: What do we need?**

**PG:** I would make two points. First, it's obvious, of course, the institutions we have today have not solved our water problems. But the second point is that doesn't necessarily mean we need new institutions. It certainly suggests that we need, at minimum, better-run institutions.

But it is also possible that we in the U.S. need to fundamentally rethink the way we manage water. We should be managing water at the watershed level, rather than the state level. Or we should be managing it for local resources rather than relying on federal subsidies and federal polices. There are certain things we have to do at the federal level and certain things we have to do at the local level. And we haven't been very good about figuring out which is which.

**RS: Much is made of interpretations that position water as a commodity rather than a human right. What is your view?**

**PG:** I do think that water is a human right. The challenge is how do we implement that right, what does it really mean? Water is also an economic good, and figuring out how to balance these things in ways that protect humans and ecosystems is going to be a challenge. It's going to be a leading challenge.

**RS: What about managing political conflict? Is there a need for a new world body to arbitrate water disputes?**

**PG:** There's a long history of conflict going back 5,000 years. And as water becomes more scarce and demand rises, the risk of political conflict and violence over water will grow. The places that concern me most are, as you might imagine, already water-scarce: the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, parts of Asia, the Southwestern United States. Where water is already tight, where supplies are scarce or demand high compared to water availability, political tensions are high.

Most disputes over water are subnational, local often, and they're under the jurisdiction of local courts, local laws, local water rights, local water allocations. There has been some discussion about some sort of water tribunal at the international level for shared water. And that might have some value. But the best way to reduce conflicts over shared water resources is by a bilateral or multilateral treaty with the parties involved. The U.S. and Mexico signed a treaty on the Colorado River. The U.S. and Canada signed a treaty about the Great Lakes. Nile River riparian nations are working hard to come up with a treaty acceptable to all of them. That's the only real way to get a comprehensive agreement. I don't think a new world body would necessarily help that.

**RS: As regards water privatization, your books propose a set of principles to guide public- and private-sector water managers. Do you see evidence of those principles being adopted, or is it too soon?**

**PG:** Yes, we do. There's enormous public opposition to privatization. The public is very concerned about private control of water resources, about the transparency of private water providers. And so, increasingly, as privatization has been proposed, there's been push-back, there's been opposition. So balancing the public and private aspects of water is also going to be part of the challenge in the coming years. And my feeling is that, unless some of the principles that we put forward are adopted—of public transparency, government oversight and regulation, of public participation and decision making about rates and design and systems operation—then public opposition can stop privatization. So it makes sense in my mind for the private companies to try and do this properly, or they're not going to get a chance to do it at all.

**RS: So, what's most urgently needed?**

**PG:** We can't do it all, but we don't have to. But what we really need to do is the things that are the most effective and the most efficient and the quickest. I very firmly believe that there are sustainable solutions to dealing with the complex set of challenges to fix in the water area. There are lots of smart people working on the problem; there are lots of innovative ideas and practices being tested. I think the real question is, how fast will the transition to a soft path for water occur, and how much suffering will have to happen before we are well along on that path. **TAP**

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***Roger D. Stone*** *is president of the Sustainable Development Institute in Washington, D.C., and is the author of five books on environmental issues, including* The Voyage of the Sanderling, *a report on the condition of the Atlantic coastline from Maine to Brazil.*



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# The Perils of Privatization

*The conflict between multinational corporations' quest for profits and the simple human right to clean, safe water*

**BY WENONAH HAUTER**

**IF ADEQUATE WATER FOR DRINKING** and sanitation is essential for life, shouldn't we consider water a human right? Not everyone thinks so. In February, the United Nations Human Rights Council missed a critical opportunity to recognize a human right to water. As a result of lobbying by the United States and Canada, the council derailed a European-backed declaration, accepting instead a weaker resolution that actually protects a corporation's right to *sell* water.

As illustrated by the February United Nations vote, our government and its corporate allies believe that water is a new profit center. They are promoting markets and privatization as the solution to providing water to the world's poor—1.4 billion people without access to drinking water and 2.5 billion without sanitation services. International finance institutions, funded by the United States and other developed nations, provide loans to developing nations on the condition that they privatize services and charge steep user fees. Indeed, the very institutions that are charged with alleviating poverty, like the World Bank, are implementing policies that force people who make $1 or $2 a day to choose among food, housing, or water.

Contrast this with the United States where, at the turn of the 20th century, reformers concerned about the high levels of water-borne disease successfully campaigned for public funding of municipal water and sewage systems. Today, public utilities provide 86 percent of household drinking water and 98 percent of sewer services. But the same economic interests promoting privatization in the developing world are clamoring for it in the United States.

Over the past 15 years, private water corporations, mostly European, have begun targeting American cities for privatization. Equity research firms predict that privatization of water services and private investment in pipes and infrastructure could provide large and stable profits. Proponents of privatization cite economic efficiency as one of its biggest selling points. But studies by independent researchers and even dissenting voices within the World Bank refute this claim.

## A RECORD OF EMPTY PROMISES

Communities all over the world have suffered from the empty promises of water-privatization profiteers. Whether in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, or Guayaquil, Ecuador, or Atlanta, the results have been devastating. They include cost-cutting measures that jeopardize public safety, job cuts to essential staff, maintenance and water quality problems, lack of infrastructure investment, sewage spills, corruption, environmental degradation, outrageous rate hikes, and political meddling.

Almost across the board, private corporations deliver poorer service at a higher cost than do most public utilities. Surveys of U.S. utilities show that privately owned water utilities charge customers significantly higher water rates than their publicly owned counterparts charge—anywhere from 13 percent to almost 50 percent more, according to an analysis by Food & Water Watch, the advocacy group I direct. The reality is that any "efficiency" is realized by firing staff—often up to half of existing staff—undermining the ability of the utility to maintain pipes and other infrastructure.

Case studies from recent practices around the globe tell the story. In 2005, the government of Tanzania canceled its 10-year contract with the British-based firm Biwater after two years of poor management and unmet obligations left people without water and the government short about $3.25 million. The East African country enjoyed some measure of justice in early 2008 when an international tribunal ruled that Biwater must pay almost $8 million in damages and fees to the state water utility in Dar es Salaam. Not coincidentally, the company had taken control of the city's water supply in a controversial, noncompetitive privatization process favored by the British government and the World Bank. One critic was quoted as saying: "The evidence clearly shows that water privatization has been a disastrous policy for poor people around the world, but the World Bank insisted on imposing water privatization in Tanzania in return for much needed debt relief."

Halfway around the world, the same disastrous model also was foisted upon the people of Ecuador. There, the wheels were set in motion by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), whose lending policies are as damaging as those of the World Bank because they require privatization of water utilities without considering restructuring and rehabilitating public utilities. In this case, the IDB loaned $40 million to the government of Ecuador to prepare a subsidiary of the U.S.–based contracting giant Bechtel to operate the water and sewer system in the country's largest city, Guayaquil.

Shortly after the subsidiary, which became known as Interagua, took over in Guayaquil in 2001, it dismissed all the workers from the previously public-owned utility. The company partially bowed to public pressure by rehiring 20 percent of them the following year. But mass firings were only one installment of the nightmare. The media reported in 2002 that Interagua was treating only 5 percent of the sewage and releasing the rest directly into the Guayas River. The Guayaquil health department began issuing reports of skin ailments, including rashes; respiratory problems such as asthma; and diarrhea and other gastric illnesses. Authorities found that Interagua's poor service also contributed to a major outbreak of Hepatitis A in 2005.

Unfortunately, a similar story can be



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told by communities across Latin America. The World Bank and IDB provided loans to Bolivia for water and sewer systems in its capital, La Paz, and neighboring El Alto, only on the condition that private companies supply these services. In 1997, Aguas del Illimani, led by Paris-based Suez, the world's second largest water and wastewater corporation, obtained a 30-year contract to operate the cities' water and sewer systems, but by 2005 long-festering anger over massive rate hikes and poor service contributed to public protests, a general strike, and social unrest.

The contract written by the company had "red lined" poorer neighborhoods, leaving 200,000 people without water services. In addition, some 80,000 families who should have been served were denied water. A connection fee of $450—a poor family's food budget for two years—was charged to hook up to water and sanitation services. The Bolivian government audited the company's performance and found it had not complied with the contract, had not made the required investments in infrastructure, and had a dismal environmental performance.

## ROUGH WATERS IN AMERICA

Sadly, Suez and the other water corporations have had a similar record in the United States. United Water, a Suez subsidiary, began a 20-year, $428 million contract in 1999 to operate and manage Atlanta's water and sewer system. At the time, United Water bragged that "Atlanta for us will be a reference worldwide, a kind of showcase."

Instead, a fiasco ensued. The company overstated the amount of money it could save the city and underestimated the work needed to maintain and operate the system. In Atlanta, the company cut costs by firing almost 400 employees—half of the utilities staff. United Water tried to add $80 million to the contract and then, after the city refused, inflated billable costs, even billing the city for work it hadn't performed. It raised sewer rates an average of 12 percent every year it had the contract.

There were other problems, as well. In 2003, the city's deputy water commissioner told *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, "My biggest concern is a lot of people have lost confidence in the water itself. Over the past year, we've had so many boil water advisories and discolored water around the system." Finally fed up with United Water, Atlanta terminated the contract later that year.

In other cases, concerned citizens are fighting back. The town of Emmaus, in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley, is one such example. Facing costly repairs and improvements in their public water system, borough leaders in 2005 entertained bids from private corporations, promising that proceeds from the sale of the town's water supply would be invested in tax cuts for residents. Then came the bad news: The prospective corporate buyer would likely raise rates by three or four times.



*A resident with her toothpaste and brush waits by a faucet for water service that is often intermittent in El Alto, Bolivia, where privatization has been a dismal failure.*

DADO GALDIERI / AP IMAGES

A grass-roots effort soon mobilized, urging the town council to "stop the corporate water grab" and "save our water for future generations." Paul Marin, one of the organizers, remembers asking: "Why turn this or any other public resource that the community already owns and has paid for over to a private entity? You're paying twice. It's like selling your house and then paying the buyer's mortgage over the next 30 years."

Eventually, town leaders relented, and Emmaus kept its water. Rates did go up enough to restore the town's water fund and buy needed upgrades, but customers are still paying among the lowest water prices in the state.

Unfortunately, the happy ending for Emmaus does not ensure public control of water in other American communities. Private corporations continue to approach local leaders with promises to repair water infrastructure and increase efficiency.

Indeed, in the United States, our drinking water and sewer systems, many of which are more than 100 years old, do need upgrades. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that we are falling short on water-infrastructure funding by a whopping $22 billion yearly. Fortunately, a real solution does exist. Instead of allowing irresponsible private-investment schemes, we need to plan ahead for future generations by creating a dedicated source of public funding so that communities across America can keep their water clean, safe, and affordable. Water is a vital resource, critical for all of us. It deserves no less than the trust funds that currently help finance our highways, harbors, and wildlife habitats. It is time for a federal trust fund for clean and safe water.

And in the developing world, it's time for a new model. The answer to providing safe, affordable drinking water and sewer services to developing nations is not giant corporations. It's time that the world's richest nations, including our own, use their influence to change the policies of the international finance institutions they fund. The World Bank and the IDB should stop predicating their loans on privatization. These powerful institutions must stop forcing poor countries to structure their economies in a way to benefit multinational corporations, and instead prioritize public health and increased access to clean and affordable water for all people. Because water is, after all, a human right. **TAP**

***Wenonah Hauter*** *is executive director of Food & Water Watch in Washington, D.C.*



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# Facing Up To Freshwater Pollution

*We are at a turning point as momentous as the 1970s, when the Clean Water Act was enacted.*

**BY NANCY STONER AND JON DEVINE**



**THE STATE OF FRESHWATER IN THE** United States resembles *A Tale of Two Cities*. It is the best of times in that, in the latter portion of the 20th century, we reversed the general disregard for water bodies. Our nation rallied in the face of flammable rivers, water bodies used as dumps for industrial waste and municipal sewage, and wetland losses of approximately 450,000 acres per year. Waterways are significantly healthier today because a previous generation of leaders had the vision and commitment to insist upon it. But it is the worst of times in that progress today has essentially plateaued far short of the national goal, stated in the very first section of the 1974 Clean Water Act, of having fishable and swimmable waters. The law's goal of eliminating pollution discharges has, moreover, been reduced to a fantasy of a bygone era.

There are numerous, ominous signs of complacency. The U.S. continues to rely upon technologies developed decades ago, or, in the case of wastewater treatment, almost 100 years ago. We have let our sewer systems fall into disrepair, allowing raw and partially treated sewage to flow into waterways because it never reaches the plant for treatment. At our current rate of investment, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has projected that sewage pollution will be as high in 2025 as it was in 1968, before the passage of the Clean Water Act.

Under the guise of responding to a pair of Supreme Court decisions, the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers no longer require permits for many discharges that pollute or destroy wetlands or headwater streams. Federal clean-water policy historically has done a poor job of protecting against pollution from storm water and from agriculture. And we have barely begun to come to terms with the droughts and flooding, the harm to cold-water fisheries, and the threats to drinking-water supplies that global warming will bring.

In short, the country finds itself at a turning point as momentous as it faced in the 1970s when the clean-water law was enacted. It would be a mistake to continue on the current path, which threatens to lead to the reversal of much of the progress of the last several decades. The nation must recommit to implement the policies that served us well and turned the country's waters around. It must also employ new techniques that prevent pollution. Just as we face an urgent need to cope with the parallel problems of increasing drinking water scarcity and overconsumption, we must redouble our efforts to control water pollution. What follows is a set of recommendations to do so.

## RECOMMITTING TO PROGRESS

One particularly acute problem today is that the agencies responsible for implementing the Clean Water Act have refused to apply the law to all the water bodies that they have the authority to protect. Two recent Supreme Court decisions have raised questions about the degree to which certain kinds of water bodies are included in the law's programs regulating industrial pollution, oil spills, and the destruction of waterways. These decisions did not, however, strike down the existing, broadly protective rules. Rather than safeguard the waters unaffected by the Court's decision, the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers have made things worse by refusing (or making it harder) to protect certain kinds of water bodies—particularly so-called "isolated" waters and headwater and seasonal tributary streams. This problem is as fundamental as they come. We cannot effectively protect lakes, rivers, and coastal waters if we do not protect the waters that flow into them.

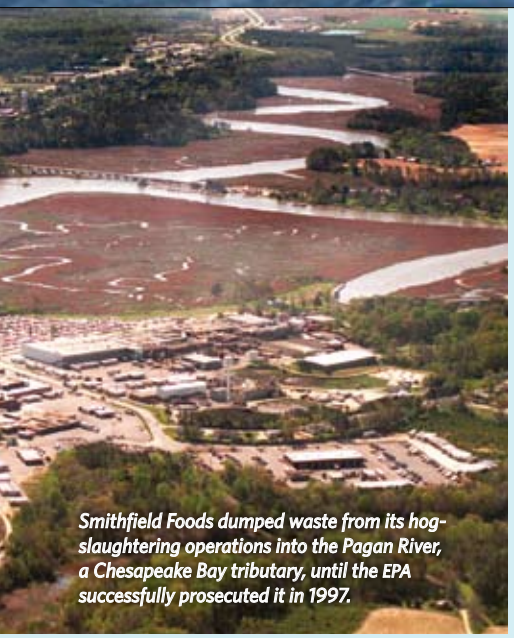
As the universe of water bodies being protected has shrunk, so too has federal funding for clean-water infrastructure needs. The gap between the amount of federal funding and the estimated wastewater needs has been estimated at approximately $20 billion annually. We should close the funding gap, identify a dedicated source of funding for clean-water infrastructure as we have for highways and other U.S. infrastructure needs, and start spending smarter on technologies that are more effective and more sustainable.

Putting the environmental cop back on the beat is also crucial. The Government Accountability Office found that the EPA's total budget for enforcement fell 5 percent from 1997 to 2006, with real funding for enforcement in its regional offices declining by 8 percent and similar cuts in regional enforcement staff.

Finally, the government ought to get out of the game of making special rules for various industries. The Bush administration has bent over backward to make it easier for coal-mining operations to dispose of their waste in mountain streams and to authorize the complete destruction of those headwaters. The present EPA, likewise, has fought to exempt operations that pump water from one water body to another—no matter how polluted or



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*Smithfield Foods dumped waste from its hog-slaughtering operations into the Pagan River, a Chesapeake Bay tributary, until the EPA successfully prosecuted it in 1997.*

AIJAZ RAHI / AP IMAGES

how pristine the receiving water—from the usual obligation to have a discharge permit. Other examples abound.

### URBAN AND RURAL FIXES

Storm water runoff from development is one of the largest and fastest growing sources of water pollution in the U.S. As previously undeveloped land is paved over and built upon, the amount of storm water running off roofs, streets, and other impervious surfaces increases, carrying pollutants that can degrade the quality of local and regional water bodies. The increased velocity and volume of runoff cause dramatic changes in hydrology and water quality that result in a variety of problems. These include increased flooding, stream channel degradation, habitat loss, changes in water temperature, contamination of water resources, and increased erosion and sedimentation. These changes affect ecosystem functions, biological diversity, public health, recreation, economic activity, and general community well-being. In short, nature's own ability to maintain a water balance is lost to a changing landscape and new impervious surfaces.

The challenge of reducing storm water pollution is finding an effective method of reducing the amount created in urban environments. Current methods of managing storm water largely fail to address the underlying problem of imperviousness. Storm water collected in separate systems typically is not treated before being discharged; even when it is treated, the treatment fails to address the scouring, erosion, and other physical impacts of storm water discharges. Fortunately, solutions that capture, retain, filter, and sometimes also harvest storm water for reuse on site—collectively called "green infrastructure"—are currently employed in a number of forward-thinking communities.

The EPA is poised to miss an opportunity to require developers to utilize these environmentally and economically preferable methods to reduce storm water pollution. Last year, following a federal court order, the EPA undertook setting standards for controlling storm water from development based on the best technologies available. The Bush administration found itself in an unusual position in this rulemaking where the best technologies, "green infrastructure" approaches, also happen to save developers, municipalities, and property owners money, according to the EPA's own studies. Despite the obvious societal benefits to issuing such a rule, the administration has instead now decided to expedite finalizing, in effect, a "non-rule," one that blesses the status quo.

Similarly, pollution washed from agricultural fields may not be amenable to traditional pollution-control approaches, which have often relied on the use of end-of-pipe technology to remove contaminants. Nor can agricultural runoff be ignored; in 2002, agriculture was the leading cause of impaired rivers and the second-leading cause of impaired lakes. Here again, natural processes can be extremely important. One way of reducing the amount of nutrient pollution from fertilized fields is by preserving wetlands that can intercept runoff and convert the nutrients it contains. So policies that enhance wetland protection in agricultural watersheds make sense, and current programs should be expanded.

**THESE ESSENTIAL CHANGES WILL NOT COME** easily. Until we fully implement the conventional pollution-control techniques that served the nation so well, and marry them with integrated water-management approaches that can significantly lessen the pollution burden on our waters, we can expect conditions to continue to worsen. There is still some life, we hope, in the Clean Water Act's fundamental idea—polluting the water is not a right and should only be allowed after the best technologies are applied to minimize the contamination of our precious water resources. Honoring that goal means recommitting to historic protections, promoting technology and techniques that meet emerging challenges, and ending special breaks for polluting industries. **TAP**

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***Nancy Stoner*** *directs the Clean Water Project at the Natural Resources Defense Council.* ***Jon Devine*** *is a senior attorney with NRDC's Clean Water Project.*

### WATER-RELATED DISEASES

*The annual death toll from water-related diseases is estimated at more than 5 million. Among the most common:*

**DIARRHEA**

- Caused by water contaminated by human, animal, or chemical waste
- Causes some 2.2 million deaths every year; most are preventable with simple hygiene measures
- In Southeast Asia and Africa, responsible for as much as 8.5 percent and 7.7 percent of all deaths respectively

**SCHISTOSOMIASIS**

- Caused by entering water with aquatic organisms that spend part of their life cycle in the water and another part as parasites of animals
- Infects 88 million children under the age of 15 every year
- 80 percent of transmission takes place in Africa south of the Sahara.

**MALARIA**

- Transmitted by mosquitoes that breed in fresh or occasionally brackish water
- Causes over 1 million deaths every year
- Causes acute illnesses in an additional 300 million people

**CHOLERA**

- For the year 1986, 35 countries reported 52,772 cases, 3,967 deaths.
- For 2004, 56 countries reported 101,383 cases, 2,345 deaths.



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# Changing Water Policies in the Dry Southwest

*Smart water use and a shift in water culture form a winning strategy.*

**BY CHRISTINA ROESSLER**

*Water is taught by thirst.*
—EMILY DICKINSON

**MOST OF US IN THIS COUNTRY** haven't had to think about water very much. We turn on the tap, and out it comes, clean and cheap. What more do we need to know?

Or so we thought. Then last year there was an unusual convergence of events—an on-going, severe drought in the West, an unexpected, severe drought in the South, combined with the break-through realization that climate change is no longer a debate but a fact. All of a sudden water was making national headlines. Lots of places, not just farms and not just the West, were facing water shortages. And people were hearing that, thanks to climate change, things might get even worse.

How did our civic leaders respond to the challenge? The transcendent message from Las Vegas to Georgia was some variation of the old theme, "We need new water; we can't conserve our way out of this." Cities in the Southwest have been struggling with water scarcity for years. The lesson of their experiences is that a strategy of smart water use, with conservation as its centerpiece, not only works but can meet growing water needs even in a desert environment. What it takes, though, is wide public support resulting in a changed water culture.

My father was a physician, and when our family would ask him how much medicine to take, he'd say, "Enough, but not too much." Conservation isn't about showering with a friend or stripping all the plants from your yard. The lesson of the Southwest is that conservation is about an intelligent strategy that uses water *efficiently* (enough, but not too much) and in a manner appropriate to need and the regional environment.

## TUCSON

Tucson has a strong desert aesthetic—houses are surrounded not by grass but by cacti. It wasn't always that way. Until the 1970s, Tucson was a city of lawns. Then there was a crisis: not enough water during periods of peak demand. Rather than call for more water, in 1977 Tucson's water department decided to create a highly visible "Beat the Peak" campaign, encouraging residents to do their outside watering during off-peak periods. The agency raised water rates across the board, and created a new rate structure that made water more costly as consumers used more of it.

The combination of approaches proved to be highly effective. Residents changed their habits, and by the early 1980s desert landscaping and a conservation ethic were firmly established. Residents now thoroughly embrace the idea that they inhabit a desert and should live accordingly. And their *outdoor* water conservation spurred a consciousness that led to *indoor* water conservation as well.

The effect has lasted for decades. According to a 2006 report by Western Resource Advocates, the average person in a single family residence in Tucson uses 114 gallons of water per day—one of the lowest usage rates in the Southwest. And water conservation remains popular. It's seen as a benefit to community members, rather than as an individual deprivation. Fernando Molina, Tucson Water's conservation program manager, says, "Residents here want more water conservation, so much so we can't keep up with the demand. Our approach here has been to squeeze aggregate demand down before going for more water elsewhere."

## ALBUQUERQUE

Albuquerque's population grew from 200,000 in 1960 to 525,000 in 2005. Most of the city's water comes from groundwater, which city officials and the public believed to be continually replenished by water from the Rio Grande. The city got a rude awakening in 1993 when the United States Geological Survey reported that water was not replenishing nearly as quickly as people had thought. Water levels in the aquifer had dropped about 160 feet since the 1960s. Water quality was also diminishing as water was taken from deeper wells.

The city government moved rapidly to change residents' perceptions from a sense of bountiful water to an understanding of water scarcity. In 1994, the city initiated a process that included extensive citizen participation to develop a comprehensive water policy. The plan aimed for a 30 percent reduction of per capita water use. In the next eight years Albuquerque reduced water consumption by 33 percent, moving itself from one of the highest per capita users of water in the Southwest to one of the lowest. The city was able to accomplish this without residents feeling that their quality of life had declined.

## LAS VEGAS

Looking down from an airplane, the parched landscape and the pronounced bathtub ring of Lake Mead are visible signs that Las Vegas receives barely four inches of rain a year. Yet on the famous Strip the streets are lined with massive palm trees; the blocks are punctuated with impressive water displays; and people relax outside in 100-degree heat thanks to overhead misters cooling the air.

Nine-tenths of Las Vegas' water comes from Lake Mead, which is fed by water from the Colorado River. The water level of Lake Mead is falling precipitously, due to the drought of the past several years. But that's not the whole story. Colorado River water was apportioned in the 1920s when Nevada's population was small; Las Vegas' por-



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tion is only 300,000 acre feet per year.

Despite the limited water resources, Las Vegans have historically used a lot of water per person. In 1994, single family residences used 264 gallons of water per person per day. The water profligacy of those days is gone, but Las Vegans still use substantially more water per day than residents of many other Western cities. Albuquerque has been able to curb consumption in single family residences to an average of 110 gallons per person per day. Las Vegans, by comparison, use 165 gallons.

Why? A central reason is that Las Vegas is still behind the curve in its adoption of a culture of water conservation and efficiency. To be fair, the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA), which manages the water resources for the Las Vegas Valley, has promoted water conservation, particularly during the drought years of 2002–2004. The SNWA has been especially effective at convincing homeowners to replace turf with desert landscaping—important because 70 percent of water is used outdoors.

Much more can be done. A 2007 report by the Pacific Institute and Western Resource Advocates concludes that if Las Vegas comprehensively adopted readily available water-efficiency measures inside and out, it could reduce demand by an additional 86,000 acre feet per year—close to a third of its annual allocation from Lake Mead.

**Smart water use is the most cost-effective, least destructive, and most enduring approach to handling diminishing supplies.**

Las Vegans receive conflicting messages, however, about water conservation and efficiency. They are told their city is in a water crisis and people need to conserve. But waterfalls, lakes, water displays, verdant golf courses, and lawns abound. Even if a fair percentage of the population knows water for these purposes is recycled, it's hard for residents to adopt a strong conservation culture when they feel they're being asked to be parsimonious so that others can live lavishly.

Rather than wholeheartedly promoting a changed culture of water use, the SNWA is promoting a multibillion dollar pipeline system whose cost is unknown and whose threat to water resources and the environment in the rural source areas is incalculable. Massive amounts of groundwater would be extracted from the delicate high-desert environment and then shipped via the pipeline to Las Vegas. Residents in the affected rural areas, many of them cattle ranchers, fear parts of central Nevada and Utah would become a dust bowl.

Las Vegans are told that the city cannot continue to grow without the pipeline project. Yet simply bringing per capita water use down to the 110- to 114-gallon level of Albuquerque and Tucson would make the pipeline unnecessary. Such a decrease would require a rate of reduction less than Las Vegas has already achieved in recent decades, and is still entirely feasible.

## BACKLASH AGAINST BOTTLED WATER

BY KARL FLECKER

**THE WORLDWIDE DEMAND FOR WATER** is doubling every 20 years. By 2025, two-thirds of all people may be facing severe water shortages. Concurrently, the bottled-water market has been exploding in North America. Today, close to one-fifth of the population relies exclusively on bottled water for its daily hydration. In the past decade, North American sales of bottled water tripled; in some regions consumption of it outpaces coffee, tea, apple juice, and milk.

The Natural Resources Defense Council has estimated that bottled water is between 240 and 10,000 times more expensive than tap water. For Coca-Cola's Dasani and Pepsi's Aquafina, products drawn from municipal taps, this price markup is astonishing. Nestlé pays little for the water it takes out of groundwater streams and aquifers. Bottled water is quite simply water transformed into water. Bottled water is often depicted as coming from pristine natural environments. The label on Alaska Premium Glacier Drinking Water claims that it is "Pure Glacier Water from the Last Unpolluted Frontier." Minor detail: The water used for this brand is municipal water drawn from the public water system in Juneau. Similarly, Nestlé's Poland Spring brand is not spring water drawn from a pristine and protected source as its label suggests. Usually it is water from borehole wells located near the company's bottling plants, or simply reprocessed distilled tap water.

The bottled-water industry benefits from some health advocates' statements about the rise of obesity and the importance of hydration. Industry manipulations of urban myths like the 8x8 rule (drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day) have been turned into hydration calculators featured on the industry trade association's Web site, despite health experts' doubts about their validity.

Consistent with marketing bottled water as an essential component of a healthy lifestyle, the industry stresses recycling. But according to the Sierra Club, this year Americans will throw 30 million water bottles into landfills everyday, while only 13 percent of water bottles get reused or recycled.

News outlets play an unwitting role in promoting bottled water by widely reporting violations of drinking water regulations or failures with our public water systems. Bottled-water plants are likely to be inspected only once every four to five years. Public water systems like New York City's exemplary one undergo stringent checks every four *hours*.

The International Bottled Water *(continued next page)*



GINO SANTA MARIA / FOTOLIA



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The time to act is now. Climate models predict that Southwest temperatures are going to rise and periods of drought will be longer and more severe, affecting both surface and groundwater. Cities and communities throughout the region need to rethink their water strategies, and that includes taking an honest look at the wisdom of current growth patterns in the face of shrinking water supplies.

Ample evidence from cities not only in the West but all over the country shows that smart water use, including conservation, efficiency, and behavioral changes, is the most cost-effective, least destructive, and most enduring approach to handling diminishing water supplies. This is good news to all of us as we face the impacts of climate change and the possibility of water shortages from east to west, north to south. So the next time you hear someone say, "We can't conserve our way out of this," you can honestly answer: "Sure we can, if we use enough, but not too much." **TAP**

***Christina Roessler*** *is a consultant working on water issues in the West.*

# Modern Pressures on a Prized Ecosystem

*Dams and development threaten bountiful supplies of fish in Cambodia, the world's largest inland fishery.*

**BY NOY THRUPKAEW**

**CLAUSTROPHOBES BEWARE—EVERY** October or November, millions of Cambodians jam into their capital city, Phnom Penh, for a riotous three-day water festival, clogging the riverside boulevard that runs in front of the royal palace. Although Bon Om Touk is much beloved for providing opportunities to watch boat races, slurp fertilized duck eggs, and indulge in flirtation, the festival celebrates historic Khmer maritime prowess and an even older phenomenon—the reversal of the flow of the Tonle Sap Lake. This switch brings streams of fish that provide 60 percent of the country's overall inland catch. The fish are swiftly transformed into everything from porridge to prahoc, an undyingly pungent fermented fish paste that keeps extremely well and serves as the major source of animal protein for the country's rural poor.

Although prahoc is forever, its source may not be, say environmentalists and activists increasingly concerned with the explosion of hydropower development on the region's waterways. To date, at least 82 hydropower projects exist in the wider Mekong region, and 179 more are identified as potential sites. Environmentalists argue that the development is haphazardly regulated at best—largely fueled by quiet deals between private enterprise

*(continued from page A11)* Association (IBWA) argues that its industry is governed by an "effective and comprehensive system of federal and state regulations and standards" that in the U.S. fall under the Food and Drug Administration. But use of FDA regulations is uneven: Some states adopt them, some develop their own, and others have no regulations at all. And if FDA standards and regulations were adequate, why would states like Massachusetts, West Virginia, and Illinois have implemented their own stricter water-safety laws?

The industry also defends itself by presenting aggregate water statistics based on a study by the Drinking Water Research Foundation, which is sponsored and funded by the bottled-water industry. This group finds that ground water withdrawals for bottled water are modest in comparison with massive water use by manufacturing and agricultural enterprises. But this analysis misses the important point that sound and sustainable water management needs to be based not on overall figures but on impacts on watershed.

Plastic-bottle manufacturing relies on fossil fuels and releases toxic chemicals into the air and water supply that can adversely affect nervous systems, blood, kidneys, and immune systems, and can cause cancer and birth defects. The respected Pacific Institute calculates that it cost about 17 million barrels of oil to make the plastic bottles for water that Americans consumed in 2006.

In recent years, activists have undertaken a strategic campaign to challenge many of the bottled-water myths. Tony Clarke's 2005 book, *Inside the Bottle: An Exposé of the Bottled Water Industry*, drew wide attention. Fervent battles to protect groundwater from rapacious harvesting by the industry unfolded across North America. Community-based coalitions sprung up in Wisconsin to stop Perrier from building a bottled-water plant. Nestlé ran into community resistance in Michigan and California, from residents determined to protect their local water system. Even smaller bottled-water companies are encountering the determination of local groups—in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine—committed to keeping their aquifers in the public domain.

The industry is beginning to respond to such pressures. Coca-Cola recently reported that it would be "moving to de-emphasize" its water brand. Late in 2007 the market-research firm Mintel predicted that "2008 will be the beginning of a significant backlash against plain bottled water, as consumers become more aware of the environmental impact of bottling and shipping water from remote locations to their local supermarkets. ... We are likely to see companies launching more functional waters, such as those with added vitamins and calcium, while consumers go back to the tap if all they want to do is quench their thirst." **TAP**

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A Cambodian boy launches his fishing net into the Mekong River near Phnom Penh.

ANDY EAMES / AP IMAGES

and government officials—and worsened by a lack of political will to create and enforce national and transboundary environmental standards and open up the development process to public scrutiny.

Development at this pace could have a massive impact on the region. The longest river in Southeast Asia, the Mekong originates in the Tibetan highlands, crashes through the gorges of Yunnan in southern China, and runs through Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia before emptying into the South China Sea through its delta, otherwise known as the "rice basket" of Vietnam. In addition to providing valuable transportation and trade routes, the river and its "flood pulse" of seasonally triggered changes help maintain the delta's balance of fresh- and seawater and fuel the largest inland fishery in the world, providing 2.6 million tons of fish, currently valued at $2 billion a year.

The Mekong and other rivers in mainland Southeast Asia also offer a huge source of hydropower potential, largely being tapped by private-sector investors cutting direct deals with powerful individuals within national governments. According to a technical report put out by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), many of these projects appear to be funded by Chinese consortiums that haven't signed on to the Equator Principles, a set of environmentally and socially responsible guidelines that have been adopted by many of the world's largest private financial institutions. This dearth of environmental standards and a lack of transparency endangers both the area's river system and the rural poor who rely on it for their livelihood.

"Governments need to make informed decisions about whether to proceed with projects," says John Dore, program director of the Mekong Program on Water, Environment and Resilience (M-Power), a network dedicated to improving water governance in the region. "Most strikingly there is a complete absence of informed discussion about the pros and cons of the mainstream dams and diversions in lower Mekong countries that have re-emerged on the agendas of national governments and ... developers."

## How can you compensate for destroying the basic security of 60 million people?

In November 2007, a coalition of more than 200 environmental groups sent an open letter questioning the efficacy and basis for international funding of the Mekong River Commission. The MRC was formed in 1995 when the governments of Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand signed an agreement governing joint management of their shared water and development of the economic potential of the river. The environmentalists' letter criticized the MRC's silence on revived plans for six dams on the lower Mekong's mainstream in Cambodia, Laos, and the Lao-Thai border. Originally drafted in 1994, these plans were later scrapped after civil-society organizations protested that the dams would be too costly and environmentally destructive. Emboldened by China's partially completed, huge cascade of dams on the mainstream to the north, and flush with new capital, however, governments in the lower Mekong are eager to explore mainstream damming options. Environmentalists argue that two of the projects would severely affect key migratory channels for fish moving from Cambodia to Laos. Attempts to mitigate blockages of these channels have included the last-minute construction of fish ladders, which have proven almost entirely ineffective. Unlike wild salmon, Mekong river fish don't jump.

The region's ecosystems have already seen disturbing impacts from damming. In 2004, water-level lows on the Mekong River and Tonle Sap Lake, erratic river flows, and sharp decreases in the fish catch had scientists, fishing communities, and activists questioning whether China's massive new hydroelectric dams on the mainstream to the north, in tandem with a drought, may have played a role in the waterways' bizarre fluctuations that year. While opinions vary about the impact of the Chinese dams, most analysis suggests that they adversely affect dry-season flows and prevent sediments vital to farmers from flowing downstream.

"The Mekong countries build dams and sell power," says Richard Cronin, a researcher at the Washington, D.C.–based Stimson Center. "But how much money is enough to compensate for potentially destroying the basic security and basic food security of 60 million people?" This question is frequently put to the MRC, the only body specifically created to help balance economic development of the Mekong with social and environmental protections. Some environmentalists have found the



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MRC's responses less than satisfactory.

"The MRC is a paper tiger," says Premrudee Daoroung, director of Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance, the NGO that initiated the 2007 letter. The upper Mekong countries of China and Myanmar are MRC observers, not signatories, and are not required to release information about their hydropower projects—or to consult the other countries downstream through the MRC. In addition, the MRC is an intergovernmental body with no enforcement "teeth" to thoroughly vet proposed projects, Daoroung says.

Observers elsewhere argue that the MRC and other hydropower stakeholders can evolve toward a more sustainable development policy. Javed Mir, an ADB natural resources specialist, says, "Most of these countries were at each others' throats. To have an agreement in 1995 ... that we are interdependent and communicate with each other is a significant achievement." The ADB, WWF, and World Bank are now working with national governments and private-sector actors to draft environmental "considerations" that can be applied early on in the project consideration process. M-Power has launched large public forums including stakeholders from each sphere to encourage open dialogue on river development.

Despite these commendable efforts, environmentalists recognize the huge challenge that lies ahead of them—addressing not only the hydropower issue but the political and economic systems that have made the development decision-making process such a closed one. "We are fighting against the tide, I know," says the WWF's Marc Goichot. "Projects are happening very fast, and this is a long process."

Lest future revelers at Bon Om Touk find themselves with less to celebrate, one can only hope that the Mekong Basin's multiple planners will somehow agree to respect the broad principles of ecosystem management—and keep the miracle alive. **TAP**

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# The Missing Piece: A Water Ethic

*We must make the protection of freshwater ecosystems a central goal in all that we do.*

**BY SANDRA POSTEL**

**NOW FOR THE MILLION-DOLLAR** questions: Why has so much of modern water management gone awry? Why is it that ever greater amounts of money and ever more sophisticated engineering have not solved the world's water problems? Why, in so many places on this planet, are rivers drying up, lakes shrinking, and water tables falling?

The answer, in part, is simple: We have been trying to meet insatiable demands by continuously expanding a finite water supply. In the long run, of course, that is a losing proposition: It is impossible to expand a finite supply indefinitely, and in many parts of the world the "long run" has arrived.

For sure, measures to conserve, recycle, and more efficiently use water have enabled many places to contain their water demands and to avoid or at least delay an ecological reckoning. Such tried-and-true measures as thrifty irrigation techniques, water-saving plumbing fixtures, native landscaping, and wastewater recycling can cost-effectively reduce the amount of water required to grow food, produce material goods, and meet household needs. The conservation potential of these measures has barely been tapped.

Yet something is missing from this prescription, something less tangible than drip irrigation lines and low-flow showerheads, but, in the final analysis, more important. It has to do with modern society's disconnection from nature's web of life and from water's most fundamental role as the basis of that life. In our technologically sophisticated world, we no longer grasp the need for the wild river, the blackwater swamp, or even the diversity of species collectively performing nature's work. By and large, society views water in a utilitarian fashion—as a "resource" valued only when it is extracted from nature and put to use on a farm, in a factory, or in a home.

Overall, we have been quick to assume rights to use water but slow to recognize obligations to preserve and protect it. Better pricing and more open markets will assign water a higher value in its economic functions, and breed healthy competition that weeds out wasteful and unproductive uses. But this will not solve the deeper problem. What is needed is a set of guidelines and principles that stops us from chipping away at natural systems until nothing is left of their life-sustaining functions, which the marketplace fails to value adequately, if at all. In short, we need a water ethic—a guide to right conduct in the face of complex decisions about natural systems that we do not and cannot fully understand.

The essence of such an ethic is to make the protection of freshwater ecosystems a central goal in all that we do. This may sound idealistic, yet it is no more radical a notion than suggesting that a building be given a solid foundation before adding 30 stories to it. Water is the foundation of every human enterprise, and if that foundation is insecure, everything built upon it will be insecure, too. As such, our stewardship of water will determine not only the quality but the staying power of human societies.

The adoption of such a water ethic would represent a historic shift away from the strictly utilitarian approach to water management and toward an integrated, holistic approach that views people and water as interconnected parts of a greater whole. Instead of asking how we can further control and manipulate rivers, lakes, and streams to meet our ever-growing demands, we would ask instead how we can best satisfy human needs while accommodating the ecologi-



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New Delhi, India

AIJAZ RAHI / AP IMAGES

insects, water ouzels, otter, fisher, deer, elk, bear, and all other animals, including man, who are dependent on it or who enjoy it for its sight, its sound, or its life. The river as plaintiff speaks for the ecological unit of life that is part of it."

During the next three decades, U.S. courts heard cases brought by environmental groups and other legal entities on behalf of nature and its constituents. In water allocation, concepts such as "instream flow rights" began to take hold, although these rights often received too low a priority to offer meaningful protection of river health. With freshwater life being extinguished at record rates, a more fundamental change is needed. An ethical society can no longer ignore the fact that water-management decisions have life-or-death consequences for other species.

**It is not only just but necessary that all living things get enough water.**

cal requirements of freshwater ecosystems. It would lead us, as well, to deeper questions of human values, in particular how to narrow the wide gap between the haves and have-nots within a healthy ecosystem.

Embedded within this water ethic is a fundamental question: Do rivers and the life within them have a right to water? In his famous essay, "Should Trees Have Standing? Toward Legal Rights for Natural Objects," legal scholar Christopher D. Stone argued more than 35 years ago that yes, rivers and trees and other objects of nature do have rights, and these should be protected by granting legal standing to guardians of the voiceless entities of nature, much as the rights of children are protected by legal guardians. Stone's arguments struck a chord with U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, who wrote in a famous dissent in the 1972 case *Sierra Club v. Morton* that "contemporary public concern for protecting nature's ecological equilibrium should lead to the conferral of standing upon environmental objects to sue for their own preservation. ... The river, for example, is the living symbol of all the life it sustains or nourishes—the fish, aquatic

An ethically grounded water policy must begin with the premise that all people and all living things should be given access to enough water to secure their survival before some get more than enough.

On paper, at least one government has grounded its water policy in precisely such an ethic. South Africa's 1998 water law establishes a water reserve consisting of two parts. The first is a non-negotiable water allocation to meet the basic drinking, cooking, and sanitary needs of all South Africans. (When the African National Congress came to power, some 14 million poor South Africans lacked water for these basic needs.) The second part of the reserve is an allocation of water to support the long-term sustainability of the nation's aquatic and associated ecosystems. The water determined to constitute this two-part reserve has priority over licensed uses, such as irrigation, and only this water is guaranteed as a right.

At the core of South Africa's policy is an affirmation of the "public trust," a legal principle that traces back to the Roman Empire, that says governments hold certain rights and entitlements in trust for the people and are obliged to protect them for the common good. In addition to the public trust, another rule fast becoming essential for freshwater ecosystem protection is the "precautionary principle," which essentially says that given the rapid pace of ecosystem decline, the irreversible nature of many of the resulting losses, and the high value of freshwater ecosystems to human societies, it is wise to err on the side of protecting too much rather than too little of the remaining freshwater habitat.

The utilitarian code that continues to guide most water management may fit with prevailing market-based socioeconomic paradigms, but it is neither universal nor unchanging. The American conservationist Aldo Leopold viewed the extension of ethics to the natural environment as "an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity." More recently, Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson noted in his book, *Consilience*, that ethical codes historically have arisen through the interplay of biology and culture. "Ethics, in the empiricist view," Wilson observes, "is conduct favored consistently enough throughout a society to be expressed as a code of principles."

In other words, ethics are not static; they evolve with social consciousness. But that evolution is not automatic. The extension of freedom to slaves and voting rights to women required leaders, movements, advocates, and activists that collectively pulled society onto higher moral ground. So it will be with the extension of rights to rivers, plants, fish, birds, and the ecosystems of which they are a part. As societies wrap their collective minds around the consequences of global environmental change—rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, chronic water shortages, disappearing species—it may well be that a new ethic will emerge, one that says it is not only right and good but necessary that all living things get enough water before some get more than enough. Because in the end, we're all in this together. **TAP**

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# How Big Government Got Its Groove Back

*The New Democrats' intellectual architect argues that today's economy requires an expanded role for government.*

**BY WILLIAM A. GALSTON**

In 1996, President Bill Clinton proclaimed that the era of big government was over. It is now clear that the era of the end of big government is over.

The post–World War II social contract—an expanding public safety net, provision of health care and retirement benefits through a substantially unionized private sector, and robust personal savings—is under severe stress. To respond effectively to our long-term challenges, the federal government must command an increased share of gross domestic product and extend its reach in other ways as well. The public sector will be called upon to provide new forms of insurance against economic risks and volatility and to assume more responsibility for health insurance and retirement security. To the extent that markets cannot police themselves or provide reasonable returns for workers, government will have to step in. Through the public mobilization of capital and will, we must supply the public goods—investment in infrastructure, research, and post-secondary education, among others—that we have neglected at our peril. And many millions of Americans will be unable to save for the future without new forms of public encouragement and support.

As well, we will have to construct a new legal and institutional framework that counters the increasing asymmetries of bargaining power that employees in most occupations now experience. While the right to organize and bargain collectively must be aggressively enforced, the kind of union movement that dominated the field from the 1930s through the 1960s may not be adequate for the 21st century. To the extent that it is not, we will need something to supplement it, such as new legal protections for individual workers. For without effective countervailing power, employees will not be able to negotiate for a reasonable share of productivity gains, median wages and earnings will grow slowly, if at all, and the fortunate few at the top will continue to commandeer the fruits of economic growth. At the same time, the private sector will have to do its part to help finance programs for which the public sector assumes increased responsibility. And individuals will have to shoulder more responsibility, in proportion to their means, for their savings and security.

In short, we need nothing less than a new social contract that reorganizes responsibilities among government, individuals, and the private sector. It will take time, experimentation, and political contestation to hammer out its terms.

This would never have been easy, and it is especially challenging now. With large short-term and long-term deficits looming, clearing fiscal space for new initiatives will be difficult at best. And while the public is demanding change, the current administration's woeful performance since 2002 has reduced public trust and confidence in government's ability to produce change.

But however difficult it may be, we must begin the task of reconciling basic moral commitments with stubborn new realities. The alternative to a new contract is *no* contract—a society in which the strong take what they can and the weak endure what they must.

**FROM JUNE 1982 UNTIL** November 1984, I served as issues director for Walter Mondale's presidential campaign. The failure of that honorable venture—the last campaign of the New Deal era—propelled me and many others into a period of rethinking that lasted through the remainder of the 1980s and into the early 1990s. We came to believe that the Democratic Party's economic program and governance philosophy reflected an industrial era that was giving way to new modes of production and new technological sources of economic growth. We believed, as well, that the party had come to be viewed as fiscally unreliable and as fixated on redistribution at the expense of broad-based economic growth. These propositions helped shape the economic outlook of the New Democratic movement and the platform on which Bill Clinton ran successfully for president in 1992. And after a slow and controversial start, they contributed to the robust, widely shared growth of the mid- and late 1990s.

At the peak of the Clinton boom a decade ago, optimistic beliefs dominated the landscape. With a regime of more open trade, the United States could compete effectively in the post–Cold War global economy. The market would not only generate wealth but also regulate itself with declining government oversight. Government would become more market-like, substituting incentives and technology-based efficiency for obsolescent command-and-control strategies.



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There was evidence to support these beliefs. As productivity surged, wages increased across the board, as did labor force participation. Unemployment fell to record lows, and manufacturing jobs held their own. Inflation remained low and actually fell in the health-care sector. Although the personal-savings rate continued its decades-long decline, the steady increase in housing prices enabled families to build their net worth. Fiscal restraint turned deficits into surpluses, shrank the federal government's share of GDP, and stabilized the value of the dollar in international markets.

From today's vantage point, however, the 1990s appear to have been the proverbial calm before the storm. Although the Bush administration's misguided fiscal and foreign policies have worsened our plight, our problems are structural and long-term, and no simple return to the status-quo ante will resolve them. Most analysts and policy-makers underestimated the impact of huge numbers of new workers in China, India, and the former Soviet Union entering the global market system. International economic forces are limiting wages for most U.S. workers, increasing income inequality, and heightening pressure on the World War II–era system of benefits provided through the private sector. In these circumstances, average families have resorted to record levels of borrowing to maintain purchasing power, driving the savings rate into negative territory for the first time on record and raising personal consumption to an unsustainable 70 percent of GDP. The Bush administration has squandered the resources it could have used to ease the reform of the large entitlement programs. And the back-loaded costs of deregulation are now clear: among them, an epidemic of corporate misconduct and crisis in credit markets, here and abroad.

**IT IS EASY TO DISMISS** all this as the latest iteration of the gloom-and-doom narrative that every economic down-cycle generates. But there is evidence that our difficulties are more than cyclical.

***Compensation.*** Recent work by MIT economists Frank Levy and Peter Temin shows that a wedge has been driven between productivity gains and compensation (wages plus health care and fringe benefits) for full-time workers at peak earning age. Since 1980, productivity has increased by 71 percent while median compensation rose by only 19 percent, and 82 percent of personal income gains went to the top 1 percent of the population.

In recent years, these trends have actually worsened. Since 2000, labor productivity has grown by 16 percent, but the median weekly compensation of male high school graduates has declined slightly. To be sure, education matters more than it used to: The difference in median weekly wages of college and high school graduates has just about doubled since 1980. One reason is that the supply of highly educated workers has not kept pace with technological advances. As Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz, two economists at Harvard, have recently shown, gains in educational attainment for workers born in 1975 are only one quarter as great as for workers born in 1945. According to David Ellwood at the Kennedy School, if current trends continue, college graduates will constitute only a slightly higher percentage of the work force in 2025 than they do today. The share of male college graduates may actually decline.

**There is no way to build a 21st-century social contract without increasing the size of the federal government well beyond the one-fifth share of GDP it has averaged in recent decades.**

But recently, not even a college education is allowing workers to keep up with productivity. Since 2000, compensation for college graduates without further training has grown by only 3 percent. Only men with post-graduate education have managed to keep up with productivity growth. While women have done slightly better, two thirds of them have lagged behind productivity growth, too.

Between 1950 and the early 1980s, median family income rose more rapidly than did incomes at the very top. After sharply rising inequality during the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush presidencies, this trend was briefly interrupted during 1995–2000, when incomes in every quintile rose at roughly the same rate. Since then, all the gains have gone to the top 1 percent of earners. This explains why 2002–2007 is likely to prove the only economic cycle on record in which median family incomes failed to reach, let alone exceed, their peak in the previous cycle.

Below the very top, all income groups have experienced a decline in median incomes during the current economic cycle: 2 percent for the top third, 3 percent for the middle, and 5 percent for the bottom. During this period, however, real median family expenditures have risen across the board. Debt has filled the gap. After rising only slightly faster than the overall economy during the 1990s, household borrowing has soared since 2000 and now totals almost $14 trillion—about 98 percent of GDP, up from 69 percent just seven years ago. Debt service has risen from 11 percent of disposable income in 1994 to more than 14 percent today.

Mortgage debt accounts for most of this increase. While housing prices were rising rapidly, homeowners withdrew hundreds of billions of dollars in home equity to finance current consumption. As housing prices have reversed course, families can no longer use their homes as piggy banks, depressing purchasing power and boosting bankruptcy and foreclosure rates.

Analysts have long debated whether these economic trends are "hollowing out" the middle class. Evidence is accumulating that they are. Between 1970 and 2006, the share of adults living in the middle-income tier declined from 40 percent to 35 percent, while both upper- and lower-income tiers increased.



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The shrinking of the middle class was especially pronounced among adults aged 18 to 29—from 45 percent to 37 percent—and among 30- to 44-year-olds—47 percent to 38 percent. Only retirees became more likely to live in the middle class.

***Private-sector benefits.*** The private sector is struggling with two safety-net issues—pensions and health care. After World War II, defined-benefit plans ("pensions"), under which firms assumed the responsibility and risk of providing guaranteed retirement incomes to workers, spread rapidly. They reached their peak in the late 1970s, when 62 percent of workers were covered solely by such plans. Today, that figure is down to only 10 percent. In place of pensions, most workers now have defined-contribution plans in which they, rather than their firms directly, face the risks of future economic performance. Many workers withdraw funds from these plans when they change jobs, jeopardizing their retirement security.



Private-sector employers are retreating from employee health insurance as well. Of companies with more than 200 workers, 66 percent had retiree health-care plans in 1988, versus only 33 percent today. In 2000, 69 percent of employers offered coverage to their workers; in 2003, 65 percent; by 2006, that figure had fallen to only 61 percent.

Annual health-care premiums have increased by 87 percent during this decade, more than four times as fast as workers' earnings. The share of earnings consumed by premiums has risen accordingly, pricing many workers out of the market. As a result, although the economy has 4 million more jobs today than in 2000, the number of workers with company-sponsored plans has not increased, and the share covered under such plans has fallen from 64.2 percent to 59.7 percent. Although health coverage under public low-income programs rose from 10.6 percent to 12.9 percent of the population between 2000 and 2006, this was not enough to counterbalance reductions in the private sector. As a result, the number of uninsured rose from 38.4 million to 47 million—from 13.7 percent to 15.8 percent of the total. There is no precedent for such trends during periods of economic recovery and growth.

In recent years, health insurance has been recognized as an issue of economic competitiveness as well as social policy. In 2005, for example, Toyota chose to locate its newest assembly plant in Ontario, Canada, rather than in Alabama. The firm's management cited two reasons: the lower quality of the U.S. work force, and the competitive disadvantage of raising the price of every car to cover employee health care. In areas of our economy subject to international competition, our World War II–era model of employer-provided health insurance—a global outlier—is unlikely to remain viable.

***Manufacturing.*** The past decade has been one of the worst on record for U.S. manufacturing. After three decades of relative stability, manufacturing employment began a slow decline in 1998 that accelerated into a rout in 2001. Nearly 4 million jobs have disappeared, and manufacturing's share of total employment has declined by three percentage points.

It is customary, and not entirely wrong, to point to productivity gains as the principal culprit. Manufacturing investment in research and development accounts for more than half of all U.S. research and development, and it has paid off. Over the past three decades, manufacturing productivity has risen more than 3 percent per year, compared to only 2 percent per year for the rest of the economy. This helps explain how the sector can produce more than 12 percent of the economy's total output with only 10 percent of the work force.

And this trend is accelerating. After growing by 2.7 percent per year from 1977 to 1992, manufacturing productivity grew by 4.7 percent yearly during the past 15 years. In 2002 alone, it rose by 10.6 percent, the largest year-over-year increase ever recorded, followed by two years of 6 percent growth.

The other half of the story is a slowdown in manufacturing output. During the 1991–2000 economic cycle, output just about kept pace with productivity, rising at 4.2 percent per year. In the most recent 2001–2007 cycle, however, output rose only a third as fast, 1.4 percent annually, far behind productivity gains. Massive job loss was the inevitable result. A Congressional Budget Office analysis concludes that for manufacturing, the period since 2001 is more like the severe double-dip recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s than the relatively mild recession of the early 1990s.

U.S. manufacturing is so productive that its jobs offer higher pay and better benefits. An analysis by Robert Scott at the Economic Policy Institute shows that manufacturing workers without a college degree enjoy a 9 percent wage premium over similar workers in other sectors. All other things equal, then, the recent massive job loss in manufacturing has exerted downward pressure on wages. On average, noncollege manufacturing workers who lose jobs paying $16.49 per hour will

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**The alternative to a new social contract is no contract—a society in which the strong take what they can and the weak endure what they must.**

exchange them for jobs paying only $15.10, and fewer of the replacement jobs will offer affordable health insurance.

While these facts explain the tenor of the 2008 presidential campaign throughout the deindustrializing Midwest, they do not prove that outsourcing and trade are to blame for our manufacturing woes. In fact, the bulk of U.S. overseas investment is in other high-income countries, all of which have more robust regimes of worker protection than we do. And recent studies suggest that this investment generates more—not less—employment in the United States. Productivity increases are driven by technological advances and increased global competition from both high-income countries and from nations, such as China and India, whose low-wage structure exerts downward pressure on the wages of lower-skilled U.S. workers.

While it is tempting to try to insulate ourselves from these forces, that course would prove counterproductive and futile. Instead, we should use public policy to spread the gains of economic growth, create equal opportunity for all, and insure workers against wage and income losses against which they cannot protect themselves.

**REBUILDING THE SOCIAL CONTRACT** is our key domestic challenge during the next generation. While some of its elements will require trial and error, others are tolerably clear.

First, as employer-provided benefits continue to shrink, we will need to create means-tested, market-based alternatives. Some version of the Massachusetts model represents the next step in health insurance; some experts believe that it will function as a way-station on the road to a more unified system of public finance. A system matching individual contributions to savings accounts with means-tested employer and public contributions would help defined-contribution retirement plans fill the void created by the disappearance of traditional pensions. Automatically enrolling employees in such plans unless they affirmatively opt out may yield near-universal participation. If not, a mandatory savings program may well be necessary. Workers below a low-income threshold would receive employer and public matches without having to make automatic contributions from wages.

Second, whatever the relation between globalization and wage stagnation may be, it is unrealistic and unfair to expect workers to tolerate a situation in which they bear the costs of economic change while receiving none of the benefits of economic growth. At the very least, we can index the minimum wage to inflation and expand the Earned Income Tax Credit to cover single workers. And we should create an actuarially sound insurance system—financed by a modest increase in the payroll tax—that would compensate workers for abrupt downward lurches in wages.

Third, we cannot rebuild U.S. manufacturing on the basis of 20th-century industries. Steel mills and automobile plants will never again provide expanding employment opportunities. This does not mean that employment in the sector is fated to continue its decline. One piece of the answer is to focus on the bottlenecks that are harming our economy and society. This means investing much more in 21st-century infrastructure—not only roads and bridges but also airports and light rail. In addition, we should encourage the development of technologies in areas, such as alternative energy and environmental protection, for which there is growing demand, at home and abroad.

And fourth, despite clear market signals that post-secondary education and training are essential, too many young adults are not getting the message. Lower-income students from families without a history of college education are unwilling to incur debt, in part because they do not yet believe in the promised returns on education, and in part because they doubt their capacity to repay loans. This is a market failure that hurts the country as well as the individuals who underinvest in their future. The public sector should follow the lead of a handful of elite private universities, which have begun to make higher education free for working- and middle-class students. This would require means-tested higher education grants that would allow students below a certain income threshold to attend public universities and community colleges and emerge debt-free.

There is no way to build a 21st-century social contract without increasing the size of the federal government well beyond the roughly one-fifth share of GDP that it has averaged in recent decades. At the same time, we cannot expand government indefinitely without reducing long-term economic growth. If we make no policy changes, government will command more than 26 percent of GDP by 2030. If we simply put the programs I have recommended on top of the existing baseline, that figure would increase still more.

This leads to a controversial point, with which I conclude. To be sustainable and pro-growth, we will need a new approach toward the large entitlement programs—especially Medicare and Medicaid—that drive so much of the long-term increase in the federal budget. While universal health insurance would give us a fighting chance to restrain the rate of growth in medical costs, we will probably have to go further. One possibility would be to change our budget procedures. We could establish long-term budgets for public health-care programs and require Congress to close the gap between projections and actual results by either raising revenues or reducing benefits. But whatever we do in this area, we will have to rethink the comfortable assumption that a 21st-century social contract can simply add a new wing to the existing edifice. **TAP**

***William A. Galston*** *is a senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution.*



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# The Officers' War

*The case of Iraq War opponent Lt. Ehren Watada reveals the toll the war has taken on career military personnel.*

**BY TARA MCKELVEY**

For a junior Army officer named Ehren Watada, the road to Damascus was a two-lane street called Firing Center Road, which cuts through cow pastures in Yakima County, Washington. The air is bone dry, heavy with the smell of sagebrush, and the climate is similar to parts of Iraq. In the fall of 2005, Watada spent 30 days here, training on the Army's 306-acre stretch of desert. In his free time, he sat in the back of a Stryker vehicle and paged through books borrowed from the library in Fort Lewis, Washington.

Watada was hardly an ambitious learner when he was in college, but during officer training his commander taught him that "you should know everything there is to know about your mission, not just where you're shooting the missiles but why you're shooting the missiles." And so, knowing he was bound for Iraq or Afghanistan, Watada began to read voraciously. Among the books he collected for his time in the Yakima desert was James Bamford's *A Pretext for War: 9/11, Iraq, and the Abuse of America's Intelligence Agencies*, Watada says, sitting in a restaurant in Olympia, Washington, nearly two years later. "I realized we had been lied to," he says. "I was standing out in the middle of the desert, and I had a deep sense of betrayal. I had joined an army, and I thought it was noble. And to think we had engaged in something that had caused so much carnage and destruction and then to find out it was unnecessary. There I was in uniform, and I felt ashamed of what I was being asked to do. I think there's no bigger crime than taking your country into a war based on lies."

Approximately eight months later, at 2:30 A.M. on June 22, 2006, the soldiers in Watada's unit, the Third Stryker Brigade of the Second Infantry Division, stepped onto an airplane bound for Kuwait International Airport and, shortly thereafter, Mosul, Iraq.

Watada was not with them.

**WATADA, 30, IS AN** unlikely icon of war resistance. At 5 feet 7 inches, he is unimposing and even shy, dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and sandals, with his dark hair cut Army-short and his ears sticking out. He was raised in Honolulu, where his father, Bob, worked for decades in campaign-finance reform, and his mother, Carolyn Ho, was a high school guidance counselor. Watada, an Eagle Scout, joined the Army in March 2003, his senior year at Hawaii Pacific University and, like everyone who enlists, pledged an oath that members of the U.S. military have taken since 1789. "It doesn't say, 'I, Ehren Watada, will do as I'm told.' It says I will protect the Constitution," Watada says. He supports war in principle and is not a conscientious objector—in fact, he offered to go to Afghanistan (his commanders turned him down). "I'm against the *Iraq* War," he says. "By law, the war is wrong."

Watada is the only officer who has both spoken out publicly against the war and refused to deploy. His decision has placed him at the center of a media firestorm and embroiled him in a court battle with the government. In November 2007, a federal judge, Benjamin Settle, halted court-martial proceedings against Watada, saying some legal issues needed to be resolved. Today, Watada remains in the Army despite his fervent wish to leave, as he awaits the outcome of the legal dispute.

Although it may have once seemed that way, Watada is not alone in his beliefs. He is part of a growing group of career military officers who have devoted their lives to the armed forces but, in recent months and years, have turned on the institution they once swore to uphold and obey. Their reasons are complex, varied, and personal, ranging from opposition to the civilian leadership in Washington to an understandable desire to resume their lives as spouses and parents. But the trigger for their unhappiness with the military is the same across the board: Iraq.

The dissatisfaction of individuals within the military is a symptom of an apparently intractable war that will continue for decades if John McCain has his way, or for months, if not years, if a Democrat is elected. The war may have pushed the U.S. armed forces, as well as soldiers and officers themselves, past the point of endurance. During the Vietnam War, soldiers were deployed only once, for a year or less. At the time, it was easier to meet the demands because of the draft. Today, the Army is the smallest it has been since 1941. Soldiers work overtime, going to Iraq for multiple deployments and serving 15 months on each tour of duty.

Many officers have come to believe that the war serves little purpose, but they exist in a restricted environment that is hardly conducive to airing grievances. Nevertheless, they are



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increasingly saying, "Enough." A striking number of officers have chosen to leave the armed forces—by deciding not to re-enlist after completing their official military obligation, by turning to civilian lawyers when they are told to deploy to Iraq, and, increasingly, through desertion. Among those who remain in the military, morale is low, largely because of the damage caused by Iraq. In a February poll sponsored by *Foreign Policy* magazine and the Center for a New American Security, a Washington, D.C.–based research organization, 42 percent of current and former military officers said that they believe "the war in Iraq has broken the U.S. military." Nearly 90 percent said the war "has stretched the U.S. military dangerously thin." They might not express it as openly as Watada, but the fact that officers are voicing these sentiments at all is something close to revolutionary.

**Many officers have come to believe that the war serves little purpose, but they exist in a restricted environment that is hardly conducive to airing grievances. Nevertheless, they are increasingly saying, "Enough."**

**ARMY OFFICIALS COULD** have resolved the Watada matter with little fanfare. In the months after he read Bamford's book in the Yakima desert, Watada began privately questioning whether or not he should go to Iraq. "I felt depressed," he says. "I felt trapped." He reached out to the people around him. An Army chaplain, a Chinese American who had protested military rule at Tiananmen Square in the 1980s, advised him not to get overly agitated. "Life is long," the chaplain told him.

In early 2006, Watada handed his senior commander a resignation letter. "I told him I would be willing to prepare and train other soldiers to go and fight. But it's just not something I personally could do." While commanding officers discussed the letter, Watada spent one month training for military maneuvers. But the officers began to get frustrated when they realized that Watada was determined not to deploy, regardless of the personnel shortage in Iraq, the president's order, or the commander's wishes. One officer told him, "In your resignation letter, you say you're willing to go to prison. We can accommodate that." Watada thought, "Maybe it's time to get a lawyer."

Within months, he had hired civil-rights attorney Eric A. Seitz, who has defended such well-known clients as American Indian activist Leonard Peltier. Watada says that Seitz warned him he could be handcuffed and forcibly taken to Iraq. "Between 1968 and 1974 I was aware of many cases in which individuals who were opposed to the Vietnam War submitted applications for discharge as conscientious objectors and were required to deploy to Vietnam before the applications were acted on," Seitz says. "In some cases, their applications were denied, leading to disciplinary actions in Vietnam where it was exceptionally difficult to help them." Watada found that a terrifying prospect.

And so he decided to go public. During an eight-month media blitz, he was featured on CNN's *Situation Room* and the CBS Evening News and in *The New York Times*. Members of Courage to Resist, an anti-war organization based in Oakland, California, created the Web site, "Thank You Lt. Ehren Watada," and celebrities took notice. Over the next few months, Susan Sarandon, Martin Sheen, and Ed Asner all added their names to a list of supporters on the site, and Sean Penn called Watada to speak with him about his situation. ("It was like talking to a friend of mine," Watada says.)

In some ways, the attention has paid off. Watada has become a cause célèbre of the anti-war movement and a visible symbol of officers' dissatisfaction with the war. But in the eyes of the military, publicly speaking out against the war is an offense as great as or greater than missing that plane to Kuwait. In particular, the Army has taken issue with Watada's statements at a press conference on June 7, 2006, at a church in Tacoma, Washington. Speaking on videotape, Watada announced his refusal to deploy and said that he believes the war is "illegal." Less than two weeks later, he spoke out against the war again—this time in person at University Lutheran Church in Seattle. "He is very measured and considered in his speech," says Ann Wright, a retired Army colonel who also gave a presentation at the event. "He knew the possibility of him being court-martialed and imprisoned [was] high. But he took a stand."

And it cost him dearly. Army prosecutors filed charges within weeks.

**IRAQ HAS CREATED** a class of dissenters—many of them officers—who, like Watada, oppose this war but not war in general. Many are remaining in the service but speaking out. Partly because of military blogs, "remarks against the President have become more prevalent among service members," wrote Maj. John L. Kiel Jr. in the Autumn 2007 issue of the military journal *Parameters*. Roughly 100 officers have signed an online petition (their names are not made public) through the Appeal for Redress Project, a Washington, D.C.–based organization of military personnel opposed to the war.

Others have simply left. More than 25,000 soldiers and officers have deserted since 2003; more than 200 have sought refuge in Canada. The number of deserters is only a small fraction of the number who fled during Vietnam, when roughly 90,000 young men went to Canada. Today's deserters are not draft dodgers; they enlisted and then changed their minds, largely because of the Iraq War. For a long time, the Army did little about it. Soldiers who were caught after leaving an Army post without permission were punished administratively or sent home. But as the number of deserters has increased, the military has started to pursue more cases.

JOHN FROSCHAUER / AP IMAGES



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**War Resister:** Lt. Ehren Watada at his home in Washington state.

Meanwhile, dozens, if not hundreds, of individuals who have been "stop lossed," or called back into service, have been asking civilian attorneys for help. (According to some estimates, 81,000 men and women have been stop-lossed in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.) They may have a legal obligation, at least from the military's perspective, to continue serving. Yet government lawyers have been reluctant to pursue the cases, say legal experts, because of negative publicity, and many of these individuals have been quietly released from the military. Even recent graduates from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point are deciding to leave the armed forces: Nearly 60 percent of the class of 2002 has chosen not to stay in the military—up from 46 percent in the previous class and dramatically higher than in years past.

In addition, men and women who have spent their entire adult lives in uniform—and who would have remained in the military were it not for Iraq—are leaving the armed forces after fulfilling their service obligation. As one former officer, John Rogers, wrote in a *Washington Post* op-ed in March, "My experience with war has left me feeling angry, frustrated and mismanaged."

**GIVEN THE DEMORALIZED** state of the military, it seems as though Watada's greatest offense was making anti-war statements at high-profile events—not only at the press conference in Tacoma but again at the Veterans for Peace rally two months later, which caused officials to increase the charges against him. Ultimately, he was charged with not only "missing movement" (which means an individual does not deploy though it is possible for him to go) but also "conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman"—a phrase that evokes Richard Gere circa 1982 and is used to hold officers to "high moral and legal standards." The charge of "conduct unbecoming" refers specifically to his public statements and, as it turns out, may be the more serious one.

In February 2007, Watada faced the "missing movement" charges in a military court in Fort Lewis. The court-martial was presided over by a military judge, then–Lt. Col. John Head, who declared that Watada had already admitted his guilt when he signed a statement saying he had not been with his unit on the Kuwait-bound aircraft on June 22, 2006. The signed statement, Judge Head said, was tantamount to a confession of guilt. Watada saw things differently. He believed the Iraq War, along with the orders to deploy, was illegal, and he wanted to present his argument in court. Two days after the court-martial was convened, the judge declared a mistrial. But the government lawyers continued to pursue the case and to push for a second court-martial. In November 2007, a federal judge halted the proceedings, indicating Judge Head erred in calling for a mistrial and that his decision may have jeopardized the case against Watada. A final verdict is months, perhaps years, away, and depending on its outcome, Watada could face up to six years in prison.

So Watada exists in a legal limbo. Each morning he drives a 2001 Civic to Fort Lewis, where he works a desk job. (His security clearance has been suspended.) His boss, a full colonel, has "created a lot of work" for him, says Watada. "It's—'Hey, look up this regulation.' If I wasn't there, they really wouldn't skip a beat. I'm drawing a paycheck but not really being utilized."

In a subtle way, Watada is being punished. It is extremely rare for a military officer both to criticize a war and refuse to serve in it. (The only similar case in recent history "involved an Army doctor who publicly opposed the Vietnam War and openly encouraged enlisted soldiers to disobey their deployment orders," wrote Kiel in *Parameters*.) Watada stated clearly that he believed the war was wrong, articulating the concerns of the majority of Americans and of many people serving in the military. His remarks were all the more powerful because he made them in public as an active-duty officer who had devoted years of his life to the service. Military officials were not pleased.

A large number of officers disagree with administration pol-

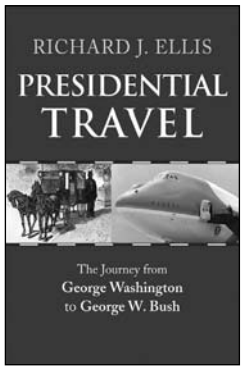


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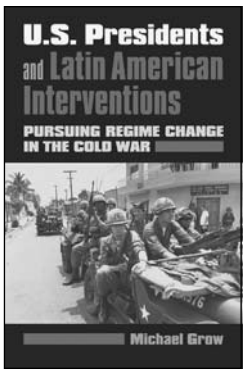
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icies that have led to the war and also with the military strategy currently employed in Iraq, yet they have expressed their views only privately, in conversations with friends and colleagues, or anonymously in venues such as the online petition. None has done what Watada has: object to the war publicly and then refuse to go. For most individuals serving in the military, even those who are opposed to the war, that is a step too far. Once, Watada says, a middle-aged woman recognized him in a Fort Lewis post office, and he tried to leave the building. "She said, 'Yeah, you walk away, you coward,'" he recalls. On another occasion, a counterterrorism expert gave a presentation at Fort Lewis about "sedition" and "disloyalty," using Watada as an example, along with CIA mole Aldrich Ames.

If there is one military man who should be inclined to show compassion, it is Paul D. Eaton, a 53-year-old retired Army major general who joined an elite group of men—all retired generals—who in 2006 called for the resignation of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. Eaton graduated from West Point in 1972, and he wears a heavy, gold class ring with a chipped tiger eye (a casualty of a swiftly closing hatch on an armored fighting vehicle). He says he is now an "undesirable" at his alma mater because of his public stand against the war.

When it comes to Watada, though, Eaton sides with Swain, who was a witness for the prosecution at Watada's court-martial. "We are a nation of laws and particularly in the military, violations of laws have accountability," Swain testified. Speaking out against the military may be the right thing to do—even necessary—when the system needs to be corrected, Eaton says, but dissent should not come from within the ranks. He is comfortable taking on the role of military critic only because he is retired. "There are a lot of guys who think what I did is at best inappropriate and at worst absolutely wrong," Eaton tells me. "But I am no longer in the Army. Watada is an active-duty soldier, and he has failed to obey the orders of the officers over him. He does not have the right."

In March 2007, shortly after the mistrial was declared, two Seattle lawyers, Kenneth Kagan and James E. Lobsenz, took over Seitz's duties as Watada's chief counsel. (Seitz, who is based in Honolulu, was working pro-bono, but Watada says he could no longer afford to pay for Seitz's travel. Seitz says they clashed over several issues, not only travel costs, and therefore parted ways.) Watada has not spoken to members of the press (except for me) in 13 months. These days, he talks wistfully about his life and career goals after the Army. "I've heard there's this position called 'congressional staffer,'" he says, his voice trailing off.

Yet despite the negative attention and the threat of jail time, Watada says he would not do anything differently. "What if I sat in prison for six years or if, after a year of being in jail, the war is ended? People would say, 'Oh, what a waste of time.' Fine," Watada says, explaining that he'd rather sit in jail on principle than sacrifice his beliefs. He says he joined the Army long ago because he thought the military served a just cause and had high ethical standards. "I believed I would always try to do what I believe is moral," he says. "I didn't do this to be a public figure—to be hated or loved. I just did it because it needed to be done." **TAP**



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# Culture & Books

*"Give people choice, but engineer the choice architecture so that most people, most of the time, will choose what is in their best interests."*

— PAGE 40




**Extra, Extra:** The Newseum's opening ceremony in April

ROGER L. WOLLENBERG / UPI / LANDOV

**MEDIA**

## THIS OLD MEDIUM

*The new museum of journalism only serves to highlight how the industry has failed to fully adapt to the digital age.*

**BY ANABEL LEE**

In his 2004 book, *The Vanishing Newspaper*, Philip Meyer predicts that the very last copy of the very last daily paper will be sold in the year 2043. The architects of the Newseum, D.C.'s newly reopened museum of journalism, may have had that year in mind when they designed the $450 million structure of translucent white and clear glass. But blown-up images of the front pages of the day's newspapers from across the country displayed on the museum's façade remind visitors that the year is, indeed, 2008. The daily newspaper is not dead yet.

The Newseum, though, despite its futuristic architecture and flashy digital videos, doesn't quite feel like it's even caught up with the 21st century. Recently relocated from its original home in Arlington, Virginia, to Pennsylvania Avenue in D.C., the museum houses more than 6,000 journalistic artifacts and excels at informing visitors which medium covered which stories best (or most famously). But it fails to tell us how we got from point A to point B, from the country's first partisan newspapers to the World Wide Web. It fails to show how journalism has evolved. And by fetishizing newspaper relics and touching on major developments like new media in only a cursory manner, the Newseum unwittingly declares the death of the newspaper. It is at best a poorly executed history museum and at worst a news mausoleum that will, at the very least, provide a beautiful resting place for that final newspaper 35 years from now.

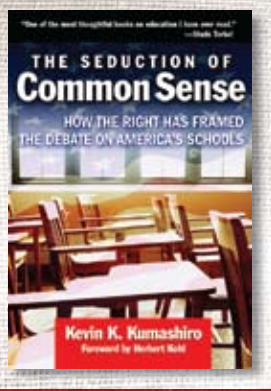
The Newseum's grand reopening comes at an anxiety-ridden moment for newspapers. Circulation and classified advertising have steadily dwindled, and the 24-hour news cycle has rendered print publications slow and cumbersome. Some of the nation's most venerable newspapers have become financial liabilities: The New York Times Company's stock sank 54 percent over the course of the last three years, and the families that owned the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* have sold off the majority of their holdings. Twenty-five percent of all newspaper jobs in the United States have disappeared since 1990 as budgets have been slashed, page sizes shrunk, and bureaus shuttered. According to a report published by the Carnegie Corporation in 2005, newspapers are Americans' least preferred choice for local, national, and international news.

Much like daily newspapers, the Newseum hasn't quite figured out what to do about these developments. An article published by financial news company Bloomberg, which contributed $10 million to the Newseum, says that "even the building's architecture reflects the Internet" and quotes architect James Polshek as saying that the building's facade was designed to evoke "a Web site screen." Web sites, of course, don't have screens, and this small remark mirrors the Newseum's cluelessness about the universe of online journalism. On the museum's seven floors of exhibits and artifacts, online news gets what amounts to a 10-second shout-out, primarily in the form of a timeline in the Internet, TV, and Radio Gallery that men-



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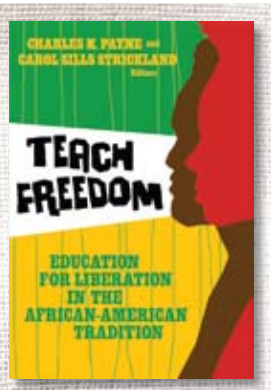



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tions Matt Drudge and the conservative blogs that helped discredit the documents used in a *60 Minutes II* segment on President Bush's Air National Guard service. In other exhibits, the museum makes some fairly obvious points about the rapid pace at which blogs and other online outlets can publish news, and the benefits and drawbacks of citizen journalism. But it would be a vast overstatement to say the Newseum fully reflects the degree to which the Internet has changed the industry.

Despite the sense of foreboding that permeates the newspaper industry, 14 major news-media companies and families (including the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, *The New York Times*' Ochs-Sulzberger family, Hearst Corporation, ABC News, and NBC News) managed to pony up a combined total of $122 million to upgrade the Newseum. It's enough to make anyone who's followed the decline of the newspaper wonder: Couldn't this money have been better spent on funding investigative reporting, maintaining foreign bureaus, keeping more journalists employed, or, heaven forbid, investing in reporting-based online news outlets? (The museum charges an admission fee of $20, money that visitors could have otherwise put toward, oh, renewing a newspaper subscription.)

While the major media companies and founders have poured money into the Newseum, nonprofit organizations are increasingly stepping in to fill the void created by newspaper cutbacks and to ensure quality reporting, writing, and watch-dogging. *ProPublica*, a nonprofit that aims to produce investigative journalism in the public interest, was started in January and will be funded at an annual rate of $10 million for three years by California philanthropists Herbert M. and Marion O. Sandler. And the two-year-old Center for Independent Media is an umbrella organization for five state-level (and one national) investigative online publications. These and other nonprofit, grant-funded news operations provide a dynamic alternative business model to the formula of paid advertising and circulation that served dailies so well until recently. Unlike today's most popular online magazines, such as *Slate* and *Salon*, the grant-funded outlets emphasize reporting over commentary. The money that media companies used to erect a 250,000-square-foot temple to news could have funded four *ProPublica*s for three years each and provided the media-consuming public with, well, *news*. Instead we have the Newseum, which presents visitors with obvious facts such as, "Today, many reporters take notes on computers."

In his opening remarks at the museum's April press preview, Newseum and Freedom Forum CEO Charles Overby argued that the premise of the question "Why build a shrine to newspapers when they are faltering?" is incorrect because "the Newseum was not built for journalists but for the 20 million visitors to Washington every year." The Newseum, however, is not even a particularly useful service to the public. The goal, according to Overby, is to give visitors a better understanding of the news and the important role that it plays in public life. But both the Newseum and the Freedom Forum fail in this endeavor because they largely neglect one of the most important ways the public now consumes news—via the Internet. Rather than looking forward and helping newspapers get with the online program, the founders have opted to navel-gaze and wax nostalgic for what they must perceive to be the good old days.

***Rather than helping newspapers get with the online program, the founders have opted to navel gaze and wax nostalgic for the good old days of journalism.***

At every opportunity, the Newseum bashes visitors over the head with the notion that the press is the cornerstone of democracy. Meanwhile, the museum's founders essentially siphon away money that could have supported languishing papers. The museum's admittedly striking



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Pennsylvania Avenue Terrace seems more conducive to fancy fundraisers and galas than lively discussions about the nature of the Fourth Estate and its relationship to the branches of government (the museum sits between the White House and the Capitol). Visitors end up leaving the Newseum with heads full of trivia, not a better understanding of how journalism and civic discourse inform each other.

According to press materials, the New York City–based firm Polshek Partnership Architects conceived of the Newseum as a colossal three-dimensional newspaper constructed of rectilinear volumes of glass to pay homage to the press as a "window on the world." It is no surprise that the largest gallery features over 30,000 historic newspapers chronicling more than 500 years of news. The collection includes such early publications as the earliest known "newsbook" documenting a deadly earthquake that rocked Guatemala in 1541, and *The Pennsylvania Journal*'s 1765 "tombstone" edition announcing that it is suspending publication in opposition to the British tax on paper. These papers would have actually come to life had there been some explanation of *how* each publication was produced or about what goes into making a good news story in any given historical time period. In the absence of such insight, the News History Gallery is little more than an archive. If the founders had really given thought to how news has been created through the centuries and what is required of the armies of people responsible for disseminating the news, be it through newspapers, radio, television, or the Internet, the Newseum would more effectively grapple with the pressing difficulties facing journalism and the newspapers that were once the country's premier news sources.

Instead, the Newseum professes to offer a "you are there" experience in order to take visitors to famous and infamous news events. The museum's Annenberg Theater continuously shows a "4-D" movie that is meant to let "you see, hear, and feel some of the world's most dramatic news events in a unique reenactment." This hokey exercise fails to take you outside of the 535-seat theater to the Battle of Lexington, the Blackwell Insane Asylum, or World War II London (in part because it's hard to forget that you're wearing 3-D glasses).

Of course, the best reporters and photographers have taken us to every corner of the globe through their vivid writing and photographs. The Freedom Forum and the major media companies and families made a major miscalculation in funding and supporting a museum full of attractions like 3-D theatrical reenactments instead of the kind of journalism that can provide a real "you are there" experience. The Newseum makes a valiant effort to downplay anxiety over current industry trends and convince visitors that the press is important, engaging, and relevant. But perhaps a more meaningful endeavor would have been to ensure that the press *is* actually all of these things and let the public draw its own conclusions. **TAP**

***Anabel Lee** is an editorial intern at* The American Prospect.

**BOOKS**

# CLOSE OF AN ERA

**THE CONSERVATIVE ASCENDANCY: HOW THE GOP RIGHT MADE POLITICAL HISTORY** BY DONALD T. CRITCHLOW, Harvard University Press, 359 pages, $27.95

**COMEBACK: CONSERVATISM THAT CAN WIN AGAIN** BY DAVID FRUM, Doubleday, 213 pages, $24.95

**GRAND NEW PARTY: HOW REPUBLICANS CAN WIN THE WORKING CLASS AND SAVE THE AMERICAN DREAM** BY ROSS DOUTHAT AND REIHAN SALAM, Doubleday, 256 pages, $23.95

**BY SEAN WILENTZ**

No matter who wins the presidency in 2008, an entire political era, dating back to 1974, appears to be ending. Neither the era's central political figure, Ronald Reagan, nor Reagan's Republican successors managed to undo the New Deal or the basic reforms of the 1960s. Yet by skewing the progressive tax system, politicizing the federal judiciary, and otherwise moving the country to the right—and by helping to bring the Cold War to the edge of resolution—Reagan dramatically affected the sum and substance of politics at home and abroad. Despite an interruption in the late 1970s and a temporary reversal in the 1990s, the age of Reagan has marked the longest era of conservative political domination in American history—roughly as long as the period from the rise of the New Deal to the fall of the Great Society.

The close of the Reagan era will not automatically bring a dramatic shift toward liberal government comparable to the rightward shift of 1980. Conservatism and the Republican Party may be in deep trouble, but neither is going away; indeed, the Republicans could well fare far better in November than anyone would have predicted only a few months ago. A reopened rift between the left wing of the Democratic Party and its traditional middle- and working-class base—a rift that has dogged Democrats in national politics for 40 years—could easily cause the party, yet again, to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Even if an old order has died, the future remains uncertain.

Still, it is startling to recall how quickly the political landscape has changed from what it was in the years immediately following the attacks of September 11, 2001—and how profoundly. "Republican hegemony in America is now expected to last for years, maybe decades," the conservative commentator Fred Barnes rejoiced following George W. Bush's reelection in 2004. Today that hegemony looks like a mirage, no matter how well the Republicans fare in the next elec-



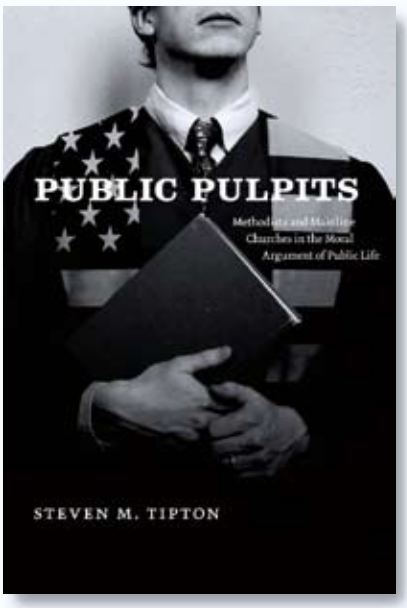
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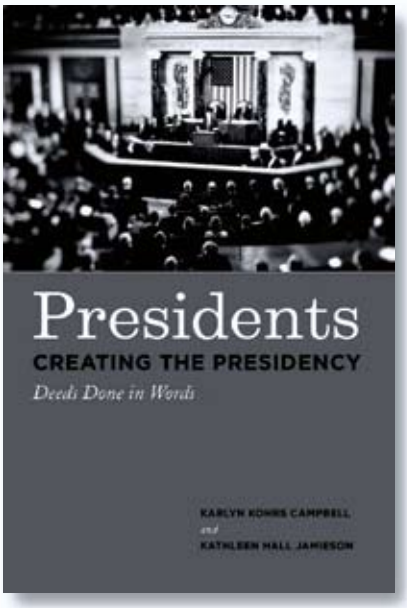
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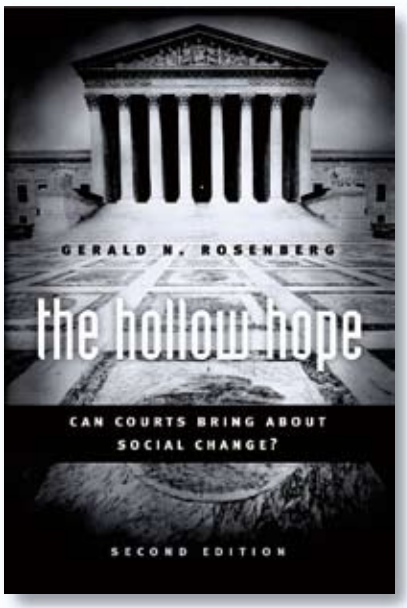
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tions. On the day Bush narrowly won his second term, Americans identified themselves as Republicans and Democrats in roughly equal numbers. But in the 2006 midterm elections, the voters repudiated Bush and the Republicans and wiped away the Republicans' substantial majorities in Congress. And in 2007, Democrats outnumbered Republicans by 15 percentage points.

Despite the bitter presidential primary campaign, the Democrats are still in a potentially strong position and seem likely to win a clear majority in the Senate and an enlarged majority in the House. John McCain, having secured the Republican nomination, now must whip up enthusiastic support from skeptical religious conservatives who voted for Mike Huckabee in the primaries—and he must do so without alienating moderates and independents. If he is to win in November, McCain will have to cobble together a new electoral majority—and, if elected, he will then have to learn how to deal with an invigorated Democratic Congress. McCain's compensatory maneuvering thus far shows that he cannot count on reassembling, yet again, the old Reagan coalition. "It's gone," Ed Rollins, Reagan's White House political director said recently. "It doesn't mean a whole lot to people anymore."

How can we explain, in historical terms, the Reagan era's rise, persistence, and decline? And how might Republican conservatism try to escape from its morass? Donald T. Critchlow's *The Conservative Ascendancy*, a useful survey of conservative politics since World War II, explains Reaganism's origins and triumph and interprets how the Republican right has actually governed. David Frum's *Comeback*, a rallying cry for stunned and perplexed conservatives, attempts a blueprint for Republican renewal. Together these books point out, sometimes unintentionally, the weaknesses as well as the strengths of a movement whose success grew directly from the political deformations of the 1960s.

The author of a sympathetic, highly informative monograph on the right-wing organizer and polemicist Phyllis Schlafly, Critchlow is particularly knowl-



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edgeable about the decades before 1980, and *The Conservative Ascendancy* is heavily weighted toward conservatism's ascent. Much of the book's discussion of the Reagan era's intellectual and political origins—the early influential writings of Friedrich Hayek and Russell Kirk, McCarthyism and the spread of right-wing popular anti-communism, the birth of *National Review*—although indispensable to any general survey, is also familiar. The narrative comes alive when it reaches the 1960s and traces how a small and politically isolated Republican right fitfully and improbably began taking over the party.

Some of this material will come as a surprise to readers other than academic specialists—or aging Republicans with elephant-like memories. Historians have made a great deal, for example, out of the rivalry between Richard Nixon and Nelson Rockefeller in 1960, and of how Nixon secured Rockefeller's support by giving him control of the Republican platform, in the so-called Treaty of Fifth Avenue. This agreement, supposedly, was one of the high points of the post–New Deal, moderate-to-liberal persuasion known as modern Republicanism, albeit linked to Nixon's shrewd, amoral pursuit of power. But Critchlow draws attention elsewhere, to the nearly forgotten challenge to Nixon in 1960 by conservative Republican hardliners, led by an activist in the John Birch Society and former dean of the University of Notre Dame Law School, Clarence Manion.

The hardliners, who despised Rockefeller and deeply distrusted Nixon, wanted to draft Barry Goldwater for the Republican nomination. Goldwater, who had already supported Nixon, was a party loyalist as well as a staunch conservative, and he would go no further than to permit Manion to publish a brief manifesto, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, ghostwritten by William F. Buckley's brother-in-law, L. Brent Bozelle Jr. Thus was born, almost as an afterthought, the most popular political tract of the modern American political right. Subsequent events followed a similarly twisting, capricious course. Disgusted by the Treaty of Fifth Avenue, Goldwater allowed the nomination draft to proceed but then withdrew his name from contention and backed Nixon's near-miss campaign. He finally won the nomination in 1964—but only after the front-runner, Nelson Rockefeller, who had separated from his wife in 1961 and divorced her a year later, ruined his chances by marrying another recent divorcee, in blatant violation of the social protocols that still governed public life.

These portions of Critchlow's book are his best, alert to paradox and to the contingent, unpredictable character of American politics. He emphasizes, above all, that Reagan's rise after the conservative debacle of 1964 was hardly inevitable. Without Watergate, which Critchlow calls Nixon's "failed coup of 1972," and the self-deluded Democrats' march to the left, the crisis of the mainline Republican establishment that presaged Reagan's election would never have occurred. Had Reagan succeeded in his challenge to the 1976 renomination of the accidental president, Gerald Ford, Critchlow writes, he "would surely have lost the general election in the Watergate backlash" and probably destroyed his national ambitions.



**Nixon Wasn't The One:** For conservatives, Barry Goldwater was.

Critchlow also underscores how the right's triumph depended on the Democrats' collapse into political incoherence. After Watergate, liberal Democrats mistook the rejection of the Republicans in the 1974 midterm elections and Jimmy Carter's election two years later as the rebirth of the imagined liberal consensus of the Great Society. But Carter's blend of high-minded morality and Southern progressivism alienated him from the party's left wing, and a fractious Democratic Congress tore him apart. The devastating combination of a sinking economy and Carter's inability to master world events—particularly the breakdown of Cold War realpolitik in Iran, Nicaragua, and Afghanistan—doomed his administration. Thereafter, the Democrats, reduced to the status of a congressional party, failed to heal the divisions, dating from the late 1960s, between their highly educated, affluent left wing and their traditional blue-collar base—the divisions that have persisted to this day.

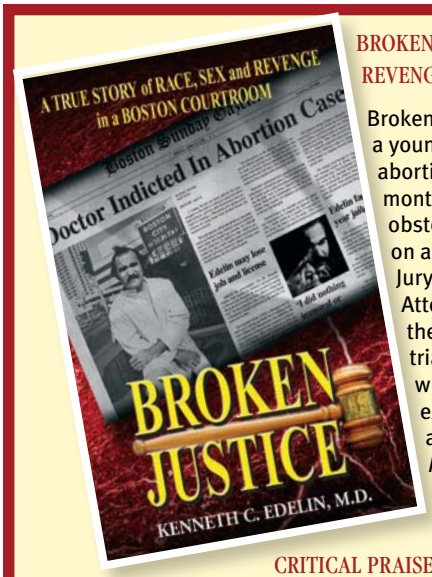
Reagan and the Republican right did not, of course, win the presidency by default. Adding newly organized evangelical Christians to Reagan's coalition consolidated the Solid South. A plethora of right-wing think tanks founded in the 1970s gave Reaganism an aura of innovation. (Sidney Blumenthal's newly reissued *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment* more fully chronicles the institutional growth of the right.) By placing on his ticket, in 1980, George H.W. Bush, the man whom he had defeated in the primaries, Reagan completed a merger of the Republican right with the battered party establishment. Yet even then, Reagan captured only a bare majority of the popular vote in 1980—and polls showed that the outcome was, Critchlow writes, mainly "a rejection of Carter, specifically his economic record, rather than a complete endorsement of Reagan."

Critchlow's account becomes more cursory, simplified, and at times tendentious once Reagan's presidency begins. The book does capture the pragmatism behind Reagan's more doctrinaire pro-

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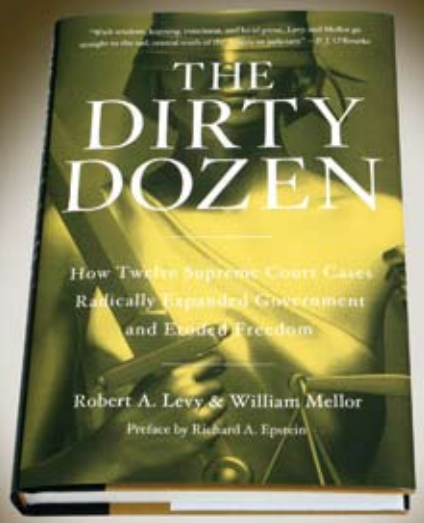
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nouncements. Critchlow notes, correctly, that although Reagan won some of his highest priorities—slashing the top marginal tax rates on individual incomes and corporate earnings, deregulating entire industries—the so-called Reagan revolution did not come close to fulfilling its agenda of rolling back the New Deal and the Great Society.

Yet once he reaches the Reagan years, Critchlow presents as rosy a picture as possible. He either ignores the damaging effects of Reaganomics, such as astronomical deficits and deepening economic inequality, or treats them as illusions ginned up by Democratic partisans and the liberal media. Critchlow either overlooks the cronyism and looting of the 1980s—most spectacularly at the Pentagon, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development—or ascribes them to "mismanagement" that gave the career civil servants of the so-called liberal administrative state a pretext to thwart Reagan's reforms. He describes the savings-and-loan crisis as an unintended consequence of Reagan's deregulation, without mentioning how the administration repeatedly ignored warnings about the looming disaster and obstructed oversight—the costliest government malfeasance of its kind in history. On foreign policy, Critchlow generally endorses the triumphalist Reagan-centered view advanced by Reagan's most fervent admirers about his greatest achievement as president, working with Mikhail Gorbachev and helping to end the Cold War. Critchlow mentions but glosses over the staunch conservative opposition that Reagan faced over arms reduction and his embrace of the new Soviet leader, along with other awkward details that call for a more complicated rendering.

Critchlow offers a brief account of the 1990s as a decade of skirmishes—one that produced no absolute victory for the right or the left but that nevertheless tempered the Republican right and strengthened its grassroots base. Much of the basic narrative, although skimpy, is accurate enough, beginning with the Republican divisions that widened under George H.W. Bush and that helped elect



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the centrist liberal Bill Clinton. Yet, just as he slights the damage of the Reagan years, Critchlow says virtually nothing about the achievements of Clinton's two terms, which included the greatest reduction in the poverty rate and the greatest increase in family income and wages since the 1960s, even as Clinton's policies turned enormous federal deficits into surpluses, ready for the next president, presumably Al Gore, to deploy as social investments. And Critchlow likewise slights Clinton's political achievement—not in consolidating a new center-left Democratic Party (where, as Critchlow correctly observes, Clinton failed) but in fending off Newt Gingrich, opening the way for a further rightward lunge led by Republicans such as Tom DeLay, who always thought Gingrich too weak-kneed.

Critchlow then strains disbelief by describing George W. Bush's dubious elevation to the White House in 2000 as "the triumph of the conservative ascendancy." In fact, Bush's victory—made possible by Ralph Nader's nihilism and a conservative majority on the Supreme Court that rendered the decision in *Bush v. Gore*—testified to the Democrats' renewed haplessness and the Republicans' ruthlessness, not to conservatism's waxing strengths. And the Bush years—emblemized by DeLay's corrupt regime on Capitol Hill (which Critchlow never mentions), the Terri Schiavo spectacle (also unmentioned), and the lethargic and incompetent response to Hurricane Katrina, as well as by Bush's faltering and finally failed presidency and the disaster in Iraq—have exhausted Reaganite conservatism, intellectually and politically. This exhaustion provides David Frum with his jumping off point.

A former speechwriter for President George W. Bush and the author of numerous neoconservative political tracts and commentaries, Frum had the good fortune and the misfortune of publishing, in 2003, *The Right Man: The Surprise Presidency of George W. Bush*—a bestseller that appeared as Bush's popularity peaked but that also reflected the Bush presidency's destructive (and self-destructive) hubris. Today Frum acknowledges the debit side of his former hero's administration: "So many mistakes! And such stubborn refusal to correct them while there was still time! So many lives needlessly sacrificed, so much money wasted, so many friends alienated, so many enemies strengthened." Live and learn.

The trouble didn't start, though, with George W. Bush's presidency. Although it has been masked by the shock of the attacks on September 11, 2001, Frum writes, American voters have actually been moving leftward since the mid-1990s—that is (although Frum doesn't quite recognize this), since Bill Clinton began making his comeback after the 1994 midterm elections. The political tide began shifting in 1995, when Gingrich lost the battle over the government shutdowns. Thereafter came Clinton's reelection, the failed partisan impeachment drive of 1998, and the strange presidential election of 2000, which the Republicans would have lost, Frum claims, had Bush not "cunningly presented himself as Clinton's true heir"—a reformer with results in contrast to the confused Gore, who never seemed to decide whether he was a New Democrat or a reborn populist. Events since 2000 have made matters worse from a Republican standpoint, to the point where more than four in five Americans—the highest figure ever recorded—have come to believe that the nation is on the wrong track.

Frum hopes and believes that Bush, despite his failings, will eventually be remembered positively, both for his decision, in line with neoconservative thinking, to invade Iraq and his effort to move the Republican Party away from Reaganism "toward a new, softer centrism." A much stronger case can be made, however, that under the tutelage of Dick Cheney and Karl Rove, President Bush has governed as a radical and tried to complete what Reagan started. It is the essential radicalism of the Republican Party at the tag-end of the Reagan era that makes *Comeback*'s prescriptions for a new winning conservatism seem far-fetched.

Frum is not the only anxious conservative who is urging what might be thought of as a Republican perestroika. In *Grand New Party*, Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam develop their earlier writings on those voters whom Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota has dubbed "Sam's Club Republicans" and urge conservatives to appeal to the economic interests as well as the cultural values of working-class, erstwhile Reagan Democrats. Frum offers a broader array of new policy proposals that point to what he calls updated, post-Reagan conservatism but amount to an adjustment leftward toward the center-right. For example, he would inject new life into the pro-life movement by stressing education and moral suasion over coercion and legal reform. He seeks prison reform "to ameliorate [the] harshness and ugliness" of prison conditions and to otherwise "infuse justice with gentleness." He even outlines a new "green conservatism" that has as its centerpiece a heavy tax on oil, natural gas, and coal.

***The essential radicalism of the GOP at the tag-end of the Reagan era makes* Comeback*'s prescriptions for a new winning conservatism seem far-fetched.***

Holding aside whether these policies would work—I leave that question to the policy experts—such ideas, at least for the moment, have no prospect of support inside the Republican Party, as currently dominated by three key constituencies: the religious right, the neoconservatives, and the pro-business, anti-tax radicals. The age of Reagan, growing out of the distempers of the 1960s and 1970s, gradually produced a Republican Party very different from the one he led to victory. Ever since, the GOP has devoted itself to conducting crusades rather than to conducting the business of politics and government. Gone is the willingness to compromise and maneuver that helped make Reagan himself a successful politician and president. Gone, too, is almost



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any trace of the moderate Republicanism that, under Reagan, helped check the more zealous ideologues inside the White House. With Bush leaving office, there will no longer be even a remnant of the old party establishment that Reagan married to the New Right. And even some stalwart Reagan Republicans have grown disgusted at what befell conservatism and their old party, especially during the Bush-Cheney years. "The political movement that I helped to create as a leader in the conservative movement is now in the process of destroying everything it had once professed to believe in," former Rep. Mickey Edwards of Oklahoma writes in his new book, *Reclaiming Conservatism*.

It is, of course, conceivable that McCain will be able to hold, through November, the hard-right line without losing the support of moderates and independents who regard him as a free-thinking conservative. Yet even if that happens, a conservative President McCain would have to satisfy an electoral coalition very different from Reagan's, and in a post–Cold War world vastly different from the world of the 1980s. Almost certainly, he would have to deal with a Congress where Democrats control both houses, as Reagan did not until the final years of his presidency. He would also face a doctrinaire Republican congressional minority that, reflecting what the Republican Party has become, stands well to his own right and suspects he is a heretic.

No matter what happens, the Republican Party is unlikely to rejuvenate itself fully until a moderating force comes along with far more political power than Frum or any group of political commentators possess—more, even, than McCain. That force, as yet, is nowhere to be seen. But sooner rather than later, the age of Reagan finally will come to an end. Whatever follows, whether Democratic or Republican, liberal or conservative, will be something new. **TAP**

***Sean Wilentz*** *is the Sidney and Ruth Lapidus Professor in the American Revolutionary Era at Princeton University and the author of* The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008, *just published by HarperCollins.*

**BOOKS**

# THE REAL THIRD WAY

**NUDGE: IMPROVING DECISIONS ABOUT HEALTH, WEALTH, AND HAPPINESS**
BY RICHARD H. THALER AND CASS SUNSTEIN,
Yale University Press, 293 pages, $26.00

**BY BARRY SCHWARTZ**

About 30 years ago, my family spent a month in London—our first visit. Soon after we arrived, my wife took our 7-year-old daughter to the British Museum. When they left, talking excitedly about what they had seen, they stepped off the curb onto a busy street—and got hit by a car. The driver had managed to slow the car down enough so that there were no serious injuries. He was profusely apologetic, but he shouldn't have been. The fault was my wife's. She had looked the wrong way as she stepped off the curb, hand-in-hand with our daughter.

Unwanted collisions like this between drivers and pedestrians were all too common in England because visitors from abroad are not used to people driving on the left side of the road. Faced with this persistent problem, what should the state do? It could do nothing. Respect people's freedom and autonomy. Assume that people will pursue their rational self-interest. Not patronize. Or it could do a little something. It could post signs at busy intersections saying, "Look Before You Cross," in the hope that people would then pay attention before stepping off the curb. Or it could do a little something more. It could acknowledge the specific problem and post signs that say, "Look Right Before You Cross."

*Nudge*, by economist Richard Thaler and legal scholar Cass Sunstein, is about situations that are just like this one, scaled up to encompass health insurance, retirement planning, investment, credit, education, medical decisions, organ donations, marriage, and more. The book is an expanded and updated version of an influential law review article they published in 2003. Though I have a few bones to pick with it, *Nudge* is as important a book as any I've read in perhaps 20 years. It is a book that people interested in any aspect of public policy should read. It is a book that people interested in politics should read. It is a book that people interested in ideas about human freedom should read. It is a book that people interested in promoting human welfare should read. If you're not interested in any of these topics, you can read something else.

*Nudge* is the fleshing out of a few simple but very important facts. First, every choice situation has a structure—or as Thaler and Sunstein call it, a "choice architecture." Second, that structure matters; it influences the choices people make. Third, there is no neutral way to structure choices; any architecture will nudge choosers in one direction or another. Finally, people are usually unaware that the structure of the choices they face influences what they choose.

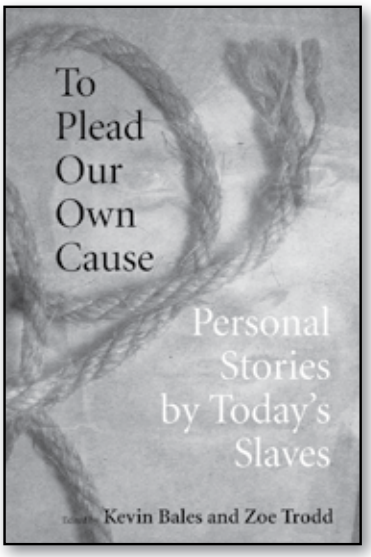
These findings are derived from almost 40 years of research in a field that economists call "behavioral economics" and psychologists call "behavioral decision making." The pioneers in this field were psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, and Kahneman was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics for this work a few years ago (Tversky would surely have joined him had he not died prematurely). Both Thaler and Sunstein have collaborated frequently with Kahneman, and Thaler himself is one of the major figures in the field.

*Nudge* does a lovely job of providing a whirlwind tour of behavioral decision making. Here is some of what we know:

Choices are affected by how options are described or framed. Many more people elect surgery over radiation when they are presented with statistics expressed as survival rates than when



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they are presented with (the same) statistics expressed as mortality rates.

Choices are affected by "anchors." An $800 suit seems much more expensive on a rack with $400 suits than on a rack with $1,500 suits. Experienced real estate agents asked to price homes in neighborhoods they know well are influenced by the listed asking prices, though they swear they are not.

People hate losses. A coin flip in which heads wins you $10 and tails loses you $10 is a bad psychological bet. This "loss aversion" helps explain why people are reluctant to change retirement plans, insurance plans, jobs, or pretty much anything else. Inertia is partly laziness, to be sure, but it's partly that the prospect of giving up something good looms larger than the prospect of gaining something better. Finally, people organize their mental balance sheets into a variety of different "mental accounts." Even money is not completely fungible. This helps explain why people faithfully put money into savings accounts that pay 4 percent while slowly paying off credit-card debt at 18 percent.

The best current thinking about psychological processes like these is that they are automatic, inevitable, and nonconscious. Our cognitive machinery spits out answers to questions like "is this a good deal?," and though we have access to the answers, we don't have access to the processes that produced them. We can then turn our tools of rational deliberation loose on the answers to decide whether or not to act on them. But the tools of rationality do not start at a neutral place; they have been "nudged" or anchored by these automatic psychological processes. And the tools of rationality are frequently unable to overcome the starting nudge. People don't have enough time. They aren't paying enough attention. The choices they face are too complex. They lack many of the needed analytic tools. There are lots of ways to go wrong, and there is plenty of evidence, reviewed by Thaler and Sunstein, that people do go wrong, often very wrong. People make bad decisions about credit, investment, retirement pensions, health care, food, and the like.

Not everyone is equally enslaved by these automatic processes. People whom Thaler and Sunstein call "Econs" have the training and temperament to cast the automatic answers aside and use rational tools to make decisions. Such people tend to reside in economics departments. The rest of us, a group Thaler and Sunstein call "Humans," are much more vulnerable. But policy-makers, many of them Econs themselves, have acted as if we're all Econs. They have usually ignored choice architecture and just worried about choice—the more the better. Just as software engineers design applications as if every user will be a software engineer (maximize flexibility and power; don't worry about usability), so Econs have designed social and economic programs as if every user will be an Econ.

Faced with the facts of human fallibility, it is tempting to engineer choice out of the system and just offer what is in people's best interests: one pension plan, one health-insurance plan, one college curriculum, and so on. Thaler and Sunstein view this kind of paternalism as a nonstarter, both because there is usually no one thing that is best for everybody and because freedom of choice is itself a good thing. But we can do better, much better, than we currently do by acknowledging that choosers are Humans and by paying attention to choice architecture. Give people choice, but engineer the choice architecture so that most people, most of the time, will choose what is in their best interests. "Libertarian paternalism" is what they call this approach: choice with the right set of nudges. Libertarian paternalism, they argue, is the real "third way."

If England wants to stop people like my wife from getting hit by cars, the fully paternalistic option is out; you can't force people to look in the right direction before they cross the street, even if you want to. The nudge, "look before you cross" is a step in the right direction. But it's too small a step. "Look right before you cross" (which is what was actually done) is better: It's an explicit nudge to overcome the strong psychological habit of looking left. If you're going to create a nudge, why not create the most effective one you can?



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Perhaps the most important nudge available to policy-makers is to pay attention to what happens when people do nothing, which in many situations is by far the most popular option. Our driver's license renewal forms invite us to do nothing when they ask (I am paraphrasing): "Do you want to be an organ donor if you die in a car accident? If so, check the box and sign below." The forms employees fill out when they start new jobs similarly invite them to do nothing by asking whether they want money taken out of their paychecks and put into 401(k) accounts. Is a failure to check off the box approving positive action in each case a reflection of people's true preferences? Suppose the form reversed the default condition and asked whether people object to being an organ donor or to having part of their wages put into a retirement account. This simple nudge triples the rate of organ donation and dramatically increases employee saving for retirement.




GAUTIER WILLAUME / FOTOLIA

Thaler and Sunstein convincingly show that by switching defaults from "opt-in" (nothing happens unless you sign) to "opt-out" (something happens unless you sign), thousands of lives can be saved with harvested organs, and millions more people can have the financial resources to live decent lives in retirement. This simple and cost-free act of mindful choice architecture can improve our collective well-being—without compelling anyone to do anything. And in chapters on savings, credit, investing, organ donation, and energy conservation, Thaler and Sunstein show how other small, usually inexpensive changes in choice architecture can have very large effects.

Yet Thaler's and Sunstein's libertarian paternalism has plenty of critics. Libertarians criticize the paternalism. Create your choice architecture to maximize freedom, not welfare, some say. This may amount, in some circumstances, to eliminating defaults and making people choose—for example, check one box to be an organ donor and the other box not to be; otherwise, no driver's license for you. (Note the paradox of a libertarian position that forces people to choose.) Lefties criticize the libertarianism. Why always the need for choice, they wonder, especially in domains in which there are externalities—where innocent people end up paying for the bad choices of others?

***With so many injuries to foreign pedestrians, what should Britain do? Assume that people will pursue their rational self-interest? Or nudge them to discover it?***

Thaler and Sunstein respond to such criticisms, though not as carefully as I would have liked. They're enthusiasts of the magic of the market—as long as market choices are structured for use by Humans, not Econs. My own view is that this market enthusiasm makes sense in some domains but not in others. In health care, for example, the "market" is worse than imperfect. And as Robert Kuttner eloquently argues in his book, *Everything for Sale*, the assumption that getting as close as you can to a perfect market will always make things better (what Kuttner calls "the logic of the second best") is highly suspect. Similarly, I would sacrifice a fair bit of libertarianism for some well-designed, welfare-enhancing paternalism. But as Thaler and Sunstein point out, extreme paternalism would often be infeasible, ineffective, or repugnant. Their advice is to leave your ideology (left or right) at the door and figure out what works best in each situation. The standard for "working best" will sometimes be clear: Organ donation saves thousands of lives, and when asked, the vast majority of Americans approve of it. When the results are not clear, however, freedom should probably dominate welfare as a standard for "working best," unless there are major externalities.

Fair enough. But this brings me to my only real disappointment with this extraordinary book. I think the research in behavioral decision making on which *Nudge* is based has major implications for what we take "freedom" to be. In what sense are people "free" to choose when a host of psychological processes operate automatically and nonconsciously in shaping our choices? Even Econs are nudged, though they may be better than the rest of us at overcoming these nudges and more willing to put time and effort into doing so. If "nudge ability" is an ineliminable feature of human nature, then those with libertarian impulses need to tell us what "freedom" looks like for people who are in (cognitive) chains. We need a normative account of what freedom means for organisms that have the decision-making characteristics that humans seem to have.

I didn't expect Thaler and Sunstein to answer the question of what *Nudge* means for our understanding of freedom, but I wish they had raised and discussed it. And not just out of theoretical interest. We look to the market for solutions for two primary reasons—market efficiency and the value of freedom. Why and where markets fail to achieve efficiency is the subject of a great deal of sophisticated analysis, but the limits of the market in realizing freedom raise a less familiar and more difficult problem. If studies of decision-making change our conception of freedom, they may change our view of how well markets serve freedom. And that could have wide repercussions in American social and political institutions. **TAP**

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BOOKS

# YOU MAY SAY I'M A DREAMER

**MAKING WAVES AND RIDING THE CURRENTS: ACTIVISM AND THE PRACTICE OF WISDOM** BY CHARLES HALPERN, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 290 pages, $24.95

**THE MAN WHO HATED WORK AND LOVED LABOR: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF TONY MAZZOCCHI** BY LES LEOPOLD, Chelsea Green, 525 pages, $40.00

**BY ROBERT KUTTNER**

The 1960s were very much about social change, but they were also a period of deep introspection about how to live one's life. The radical feminist movement made the most explicit connection between the personal and the political. The emergent gay-rights movement was born with the knowledge that the political was brutally personal. More broadly, a continuing legacy of the 1960s in all its dimensions has been a quest to reconcile struggles for social justice with a quest to live decently and unhypocritically—in personal relationships, spiritual odysseys, and material habits that limit the environmental toll on the planet. Today some of the efforts of the '60s seem jejune—naive back-to-the-land communes, anarchist movements for free love, attachments to gurus who turned out to be false messiahs—yet much of this broader legacy was worthy, even noble.

Enough time has elapsed that the children of the '60s are now the graybeards and grandmothers, and some have already passed on. And so we have a rich outpouring of memoir and biography. Inevitably, it is deeply personal as well as political.

Charles Halpern epitomized one dimension of that watershed decade—the use of law to achieve social change. In the early 1960s, as a young graduate of Yale Law School and the son of a judge, Halpern was working as an associate at the Washington power law firm of Arnold and Porter. The firm was founded by eminent New Dealers, but in the postwar era its clients were mostly corporate, though it did more than its share of pro-bono work.

One day in 1966, Halpern received a call from David Bazelon, then chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, where Halpern had clerked. Bazelon was a crusader from the bench for the rights of the mentally ill. He had handed down an opinion in a case involving a man named Charles Rouse who had been arrested for a misdemeanor, found insane, and confined for four years at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, the appalling "House of Bedlam" immortalized in Elizabeth Bishop's poem. Bazelon opined that even the mentally ill had rights. His appellate ruling would require re-hearings at the district court level, and he wanted Halpern to serve as Rouse's lawyer. Arnold and Porter let their young associate handle the case.

The district court did not accept Halpern's arguments that the "treatments" at St. Elizabeth's were a sham, but on appeal Halpern successfully argued that Rouse had never consented to the insanity plea that resulted in his indefinite confinement. Rouse was released, civil rights would soon be extended to the mentally ill, and Halpern was hooked on the potential of what would soon become known as public-interest law. "No one," he writes in his memoir, "was challenging these mental hospitals and holding up their practices to Constitutional scrutiny." By then Halpern had also spent a summer as a volunteer lawyer doing civil-rights work in Louisiana.

In 1968, Halpern and three other activist lawyers decided to found what they named the Center for Law and Social Policy. With initial small funding commitments from two left-wing foundations that had been courageous backers of the civil-rights movement, the Stern Fund and the New World Foundation, they persuaded the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to give the center a larger grant, and CLASP was in business.

It was a golden dawn of public-interest law, with new federally funded legal-services programs providing careers for activists, the early Nader's Raiders pursuing causes through litigation as well as legislation, and the nascent environmental movement turning to the courts. Halpern was one of the era's great pioneers and mentors. In its first two decades, CLASP researched and litigated a broad array of social-change cases, in areas ranging from mental health to civil and economic rights to the environment—all in the spirit of Justice Louis Brandeis, using extensive research to inform and persuade judges. In recent years, CLASP has become a full-service think tank on social issues. Halpern went on to be founding dean of an activist law school, to work as a foundation president, and to bring into being another think tank.

If the story ended there, it would be interesting enough. Along the way, however, Halpern discovered the power of yoga and meditation to help maintain personal equilibrium and humility in an intensely political life. As president of the Nathan Cummings Foundation, he promoted other projects on social change and personal awareness and a program on Jewish life that emphasized interdenominational relations, including work at the intersection of Judaism and Buddhism, which Halpern found especially compelling.

In the late 1980s, as Halpern was committing himself more deeply to spiritual practice, his wife, Susan, was diagnosed with cancer. He wrote, "Susan and I were able to draw on our shared experiences of contemplative practice, and we became closer as we joined in the management of the disease—in its physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions." Susan survived. Halpern commends meditative practice—"the practice of wisdom"—not just as a source of life balance but as nourishment for those pursuing social change: "It can help us deal with the problem of burnout—the exhaustion of idealistic



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ventures where there is a bottomless well of needs and our efforts always fall short. ... It can give us the courage to take the radical initiatives that are necessary to build a more just, compassionate, and sustainable world." Informed contemplation is also evidently conducive to fine writing, for the book is a lovely read as well as the odyssey of an era.

While Halpern was helping to invent public-interest law, another remarkable activist, Tony Mazzocchi, was pioneering the modern movement for worker health and safety. It is not an exaggeration to say that without Mazzocchi, there would be no Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Mazzocchi, who died in 2002, spent most of his career as a leader of what was then called the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW). The son of a working-class immigrant family in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, Mazzocchi lied about his age and went off to war in 1943 as a 16-year-old. He survived the Battle of the Bulge and was with one of the first units into liberated Buchenwald.

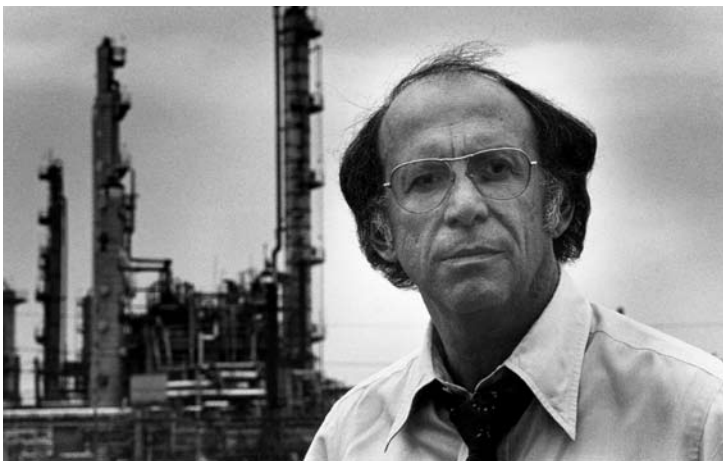
After the war, Mazzocchi ended up working at a Helena Rubenstein plant in New York, which was the site of infighting between different union factions. He was soon elected chief shop steward, against more conservative and entrenched leadership. By 1953, he had become a legendary local union president and organizer. After the union merged with the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers, he became part of the national leadership and in 1965, head of the union's Washington office.

The idea of "blue-green alliances" between unionists and environmentalists is said to be something new, but Mazzocchi grasped their potential four decades ago. His members, after all, worked with the most dangerous substances in the factory economy. Mazzocchi helped *New Yorker* writer Paul Brodeur to expose the dangers of asbestos and soon became a national leader in the cause to alert the public generally to toxic chemicals and nuclear risks. As his protégé and biographer Les Leopold writes, "Mazzocchi's conceptual breakthrough was that *pollution always starts in the workplace*, and then moves into the community and the natural environment."

OCAW became the rare union to call major strikes at big companies solely around issues of workplace health. And it was Mazzocchi who encouraged a young lab technician on the bargaining committee at the Kerr-McGee nuclear facility in Cimarron, Oklahoma, to pursue her suspicions that X-rays were being doctored to disguise cracks in control rods that leaked plutonium. After David Burnham of *The New York Times* got on the case, the young nuclear technician, Karen Silkwood, en route to give Burnham a folder of documents, was found dead in a mysterious car accident.

As Leopold makes clear in a meticulously researched book, Mazzocchi was very much a radical. He involved himself with anti-war and civil-rights causes as much as with the labor movement. He often found himself at odds with more conservative union leadership. He hoped to build a labor party. He fell narrowly short of being elected national president of his union, which today has been merged into the United Steelworkers. And while hundreds of organizers cherished Mazzocchi as the most personally generous of mentors, his marital life was something of a mess. Leopold's biography presents Mazzocchi warts and all, and through him a picture of the labor movement during an era of increasing corporate hostility and diminishing government protection of the right to unionize.

***Despite all the retrogression, some victories endure. Worker health and safety are today at a far higher basic standard than when OSHA was enacted.***



**Green Pioneer:** Mazzocchi made unhealthy workplaces a public issue.

PHOTO COURTESY CHELSEA GREEN

Viewed from one perspective, the 40 years since 1968 have represented nothing so much as relentless retrogression. The right has imitated Charlie Halpern's public-interest law movement, with far better funding and increasingly far more sympathetic judges, and has won court confirmation of doctrines that were not even imaginable in 1968. The labor movement represents fewer workers than when Mazzocchi was crusading to organize oil and chemical workers. Yet some victories endure. Worker health and safety are today at a far higher basic standard than when OSHA was enacted, and it is firmly established that mentally ill people have constitutional rights and that the environment cannot be pillaged with impunity.

Some lessons also endure. One is that liberals sometimes need radicals. Another is that the effort to reconcile the struggle for social justice with the struggle for personal integrity is always worth the effort. And a final lesson is that the joy is not always in the victory but in the journey. As Albert Camus writes in the last line of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy." **TAP**



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# The Logic of the Low Road

BY ROBERT B. REICH

I WAS ON TELEVISION RECENTLY, DEBATING A CONservative. It's something I do fairly often. During a commercial break, the producer spoke into my earpiece. "A bit more energy," he said.

"What do you mean?" I answered, slightly hurt. I thought I'd been doing a fairly good job scoring points.

"Rip into him. Only three minutes in the next segment, and we want to make the most of it."

John McCain says he's intent on waging a respectful and civil presidential campaign. Barack Obama says the same. Is it possible that during the months leading up to this Election Day the American people will be treated to the kind of campaign we've all been dreaming about, in which the two candidates debate the big issues and avoid the low blows?

We've grown accustomed to gutter politics. We've even turned it into verbs—to "Bork" (to impugn one's opponent's character), to "Swift boat" (to lie about a critical fact in one's opponent's biography), and, perhaps, to "Reverend Wright" (to create the impression that one's opponent shares a set of beliefs with a person he has associated with).

All three require a relentless attack that feeds on itself. Unproven allegations are repeated so often that the attack itself becomes news, as does the manner in which the target responds, after which point the question becomes whether the attack has hurt its target and, if so, whether the damage is fatal. The target is then watched for any signs of personal distress, defensiveness, or anger. Can the target take it? Will the target recant, backtrack, cover up, apologize, reveal more, disassociate himself, go on a counterattack? What does the target's response tell us about his or her character? The story then shifts to the media—are they continuing to report it? Are they being responsible in doing so? And after this self-referential orgy, the story moves to the polls—is the public losing confidence in the candidate? In the days or weeks this goes on, the target has no opportunity to talk about anything other than the attack, and the public hears about nothing else, so the target's poll numbers are likely to fall, which creates the final story: Can the target ever come back?

Character assassination, outright lies, and guilt by association are hardly new to American politics. Aaron Burr, New York Parks Commissioner Robert Moses, Sen. Joe McCarthy, and J. Edgar Hoover were all avid practitioners. But the modern media, coupled more recently with the blogosphere and YouTube, have made these kinds of attacks even more potent. Political consultants—those snakelike creatures who slither through the swamps and sinkholes of politics—have turned Borking, Swift-boating, and Reverend-Wrighting into low-brow but highly lucrative art forms, cynically valued by the media for their effectiveness. So-called "527s"—the headless and mysterious bodies that grow in the interstices of our election laws—have become their launching pads. In the logic of this underworld, "going negative" is no longer considered a campaign option; it is a necessity. Although it may injure the perpetrator (if it can ever be traced back), it will cause greater harm to the opponent.

So what are the odds that McCain and Obama will make a historic break with this sordid tradition and take the high road instead? Each man may sincerely wish to do so. Both have based their candidacies, to some extent, on creating a new politics that rejects the gutter-ball tactics of the old. Each has enough ammunition against the other (for every Reverend Wright, a Reverend Hagee) to suggest the wisdom of mutual arms control. Each is distancing himself from mud-slinging, though the parties may well take the lower road: The Republican Party is already airing ads linking Obama to Wright, which McCain has disavowed but not shut down. Mostly, though, the public is fed up with the rancor—isn't it?

*Political ripping and slashing is one of America's favorite spectator sports. What are the odds that McCain and Obama will break with this tradition?*

I asked the producer who was talking into my earpiece why I had to rip into my opponent. "We see viewership minute by minute," he said hurriedly (the commercial break was about over). "When you really go after each other, we get a spike."

It's the spike I'm worried about. I chose not to rip into my opponent but, then again, I'm not running for president. The public says it's tired of gladiator politics. But take a closer look. The ripping and slashing is one of America's favorite spectator sports. And the media that inform us about the candidates, and the advertisers who dictate the terms by which they do so, know it. TAP



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